Campione! Volume 7

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These are novel illustrations that were included in "Campione! Volume 7".

斉天大聖

カンピオーネ！ Campione! VII

丈月城

Illustration シコルスキー

D スーパーダッシュ

た 9-7

カンピオーネ！ Ⅶ 斉天大聖

丈月城

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草薙護堂は神殺しである。

祐理の妹・ひかりの身体をのっとったまつろわぬ神、斉天大聖・孫悟空。日光の街を自らの王国へと変貌させる神に対し、羅濠教主との戦いで既に満身創痍の護堂は!?　そして、ついにこの地に姿を現す第三の魔王、ジョン・プルートー・スミス。冥王が護堂にもたらすものは勝利か破滅か!?　神と魔王が相討つ戦いがいま全てを薙ぎ払う!!

丈月 城

Illustration

シコルスキー

カンピオーネ！

斉天大聖

Campione VII

アニー

孫悟空

J・P・S
ジョン ブルートー スミス

祐理

護堂

エリカ

羅濠

「ジョン・プルートー・スミスの参戦は、
君を冥府に導く運命の先ぶれと思うべきだ」

「ひとりよりふたり、ふたりより三人
……っていうのを知ってるか？」

ふたたび戦場ヶ原に降り立つ斉天大聖――。
しかし今回は、衝撃で地形が変わった。
黒き猪にまたがり、
竜を従えた斉天大聖の勇姿が大地を抉り、
土と緑と花々を吹き飛ばして、
クレーターを穿ったのだ。
大穴の底で大聖は騎獣の腹を軽く蹴り、
地上に登らせた。
黒き魔鳥も舞い降り、
黒き衣の男に変化していく。
地上では乙女と少年のふたり連れが
こちらに駆けてくるところだった。
『さあて神殺しども、最後までつき合ってもらうぞ！』
斉天大聖は眼下の宿敵たちへ快活に呼びかけた。

「待たせましたね大聖、
そして我が弟よ」

「だって、無防備の無抵抗」

「なんでもする気、なんでしょ？」

「ハーイ……。」

「ちょっとこんなの予定外！」

「ちょっ、ちょっと待って！」

「ムリムリムリ！」

「ここは無抵抗
でいるのが
賢いやり方
だと思うの。」

Contents

目　次

第１章
採行者、聖域を大いにかき乱す
11

第２章
三妖、倭国の霊山にて一堂に会す
39

第３章
草薙護堂、猴王の版図に足を踏み入れる
77

第４章
黒き英雄現れ、大聖は鋼の真価を示す
112

第５章
媛たちに難が及び、二王は盟約を交わす
156

第６章
神と神殺し、両雄矛を交えて決戦す
207

第７章
神々と神殺したち、激戦の果てに雌雄を決す
258

終　章
307

丈月 城

Illustration

シコルスキー

カンピオーネ！

斉天大聖

Campione VII

あとがき

■はじめまして、こんにちは！
挿絵担当のシコルスキーと申します。

■7巻は教主さまが色んな意味で反則並みに規格外★
でした。素敵です(＊´∀｀＊)

■今回のあとがきカットはプリンセス・アリス。
折角のネグリジェ衣装を挿絵にしていなかったので
こちらでひとつ描いてみました。
難儀な運命を背負った彼女ですが
幸せになれることを願っています。

■それでは、また♪

Chapter 1 - Wandering Monk Sun[1], Havoc in the Holy Sanctum

Part 1

The sun had already set, and the Nikkou Toushouguu[2] was welcoming the arrival of night.

The Okusha inner shrine for venerating the divine monarch Tokugawa Ieyasu[3] was around 200m away from the worship and main halls.

The corner of Okusha had been transformed into a bare mountain top, with all the lush cedar trees originally surrounding the shrine completely gone. A young girl was in the sky, looking down upon the bare mountain.

She was wearing a miko outfit with a white garment and a red hakama[4] while standing on a golden cloud hovering in the air.

Her face obscured by a mask like a monkey's visage, she was holding the Ruyi Jingu Bang[5] in her hands. This unassuming-looking iron staff was the legendary weapon with innumerable victories under its name.

"Yes, it looks like I'll need to change these clothes to something more appropriate to my stature."

The girl — no, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong, who had stolen Mariya Hikari's body, spoke thus.

The miko outfit transformed into a yellow costume decorated with intricate black and green embroidery. Its sleeves reached down to the ankles, two very long open slits were on the sides of the outfit, and red pants were worn underneath.

It was the costume known as "Kao"[6] in Beijing opera.

The monkey mask was also moved to the side, revealing Hikari's face and the golden-gaze fiery-eyes — namely, eyeballs of red and pupils of gold.

"Very well, this works for now. Everyone, thank you for your patience!"

The people looking up to watch this transformation were the five humans Kusanagi Godou, Cult Leader Luo Hao, Erica Blandelli, Liliana Kranjcar and Lu Yinghua.

"Finishing off two godslayers at the same time would be rather tricky... No, in a certain sense, this is a perfect opportunity. Hohoho, even heavenly fate is on my side this once."

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven spoke contradictory words, and then his divine power began to expand greatly.

What was with this power!? Godou was very surprised. The power displayed here far surpassed every deity he had encountered so far — Melqart, Athena, Perseus.

"Perhaps this snake might come in handy after all, so let me take her with me."

Lying on the bare mountain top was the beautiful young girl with wounds all over her body. Her name was something like Asherah.

The Great Sage on the golden cloud extended his Ruyi Staff and lightly poked the witch on the ground. In an instant, Asherah's body disappeared as if he had performed a magic trick.

"Appearances aside, you have at least recovered the nature of [Steel]... Very well, Great Sage! Now is the time for a decisive end to things!"

Luo Hao yelled with a high-pitched voice at the Great Sage, who had restored his Ruyi Staff to its original length.

However, her body was still shaking and it looked like her injuries had yet to recover.

In order to save Hikari, Godou also intended to challenge the Great Sage, but his body couldn't move. This was the after effect of using the [Raptor] incarnation, which currently paralyzed his body and made his heart suffer intense pain.

"Godou, if you were to challenge him in your current condition, I believe it would be a very tough battle."

"Yes, even though I understand very well your wish to retrieve Mariya Hikari's body, you and Her Eminence Luo Hao both need to rest and recover your powers. We would do well to retreat for now."

From his side, Erica gave a warning and Liliana also made a suggestion to Godou.

Godou agreed. However, the question was whether the Great Sage would let him leave.

"So let us end the intertwining of our fates which started long ago. Though there are two of you here, I will take care of you both together."

Just as suspected, the Great Sage was smiling with mockery using Hikari's face, and even spoke with her voice.

Standing on the golden cloud, he was coldly overlooking everything across the land. However, his eyes only saw Luo Hao and Kusanagi Godou as targets while completely ignoring all others.

"The earth's condition is receptive devotion / Thus the superior man who has breadth of character / Carries the outer world. *Kun*[7] is the nature of earth!"

Forming mudra[8] with one hand, the Great Sage began to chant a mantra.

The change suddenly took effect. Petrification. The ground of the now barren mountain of the Nikkou Toushouguu's Okusha inner shrine was completely changed into solid rock, bleached white as if snow had covered the land —

Godou and the rest were standing on ground which turned into grey stone within the blink of an eye.

"Hahahaha! I will use the secret art of the stone mountain's rocky caves to imprison you two!"

In the cedar forest around Okusha — all the trees began turning into stone continuously. With Toushouguu Okusha as the center, the petrification was spreading all around like a wave.

And then Godou's body also gradually lowered into the ground — sinking into rock. First it covered his ankles followed by his knees, and then it immediately reached his waist and would soon cover his chest and finally his head. As he turned his head to the side, he found the transcendent beauty, the other Campione, also sinking into the ground!

"Hmm...! Planning on sealing us away!?"

"Haha, correct! Though you're both injured, I'm not going to underestimate you godslayers... Eh, rather I should say that being

injured makes things more frightening because you are a crazy bunch who doesn't follow common sense. I didn't come to revive all this way just to take a stupid risk like that!"

The Great Sage was replying to Luo Hao using Hikari's voice.

"—Godou!" "Kusanagi Godou!?" "Master!"

By the time Erica, Liliana and Lu Yinghua's yells were heard, the two Campiones had almost sunk completely.

Inside the rocks was pitch black, but Godou could still see the sinking beauty beside him.

"Sun Wukong has mastered the Immortal[9] arts, and is a deity with unlimited divine powers. Though he carries the traits of the warlord of [Steel], he is also a god highly skilled in magic. To be imprisoned by such tricks of his, I was far too careless."

Luo Hao was lightly murmuring in the dark.

Godou was going to ignore his chest pain in order to respond, but Luo Hao suddenly smiled.

"Did you use up all your strength in the battle just now? Though it is the privilege of young ones to fight without considering the future, for you to obtain victory from me at such a bargain... King Kusanagi... You are quite something."

"I-I defeated you? Please don't joke with me."

"It is fine. Even though it is officially a draw, taking into account the difference in experience, the victor is apparent. For a renowned master like me to lose to a young upstart like you, it is an unforgivable mistake. I, Luo Hao, am not one of those stupid fools who deceive themselves."

The demonic cult leader showed a slightly displeased expression.

"As the Ruler of the Martial Realm, I approve of your ability. In the match just now, I definitely lost."

Godou was speechless as he endured the pain. The battle to the death just now was only a competition to her, as if having a kendo match and being indignant over thoughts like 'I lost a round to that guy!' Is that how she was feeling?

"By the way, King Kusanagi, do you know magic that allows you to survive without water and air?"

"How could I? Other than the ability to fight gods, I'm just an ordinary person."

Godou's answer to Luo Hao's sudden question plunged her deep into thought.

"I see... If that's the case, it would be best to return you back to the surface."

"Back to the surface!? I can get out of here!?"

"Yes. Until the Great Sage's spell finishes, there is still a window of opportunity. If I use my remaining qi[10], I can send one of us back to the surface."

Luo Hao's offer was quite surprising, but Godou immediately objected.

"But in that case, Your Eminence will have to stay in the Netherworld!"

"I don't mind. King Kusanagi, have you not noticed? The air here is getting thinner. The Great Sage is not so merciful as to provide food and water for us captives."

Godou had excellent instincts, but Luo Hao was a far sharper person than him.

After hearing her explanation, Godou couldn't help but shiver. True, there was no reason for that monkey to treat his prisoners well.

"I am the Ruler of the Martial Realm, the one standing at the pinnacle of Daoist practices. I have long conquered this kind of ascetic training over a hundred years ago, so let me stay."

"Y-You can survive without air and water, that's really amazing. But still!"

"No problem. If I abandon you and return to the surface alone... Just the thought of that brings a horrible outcome!"

"Ho... Horrible outcome?"

"Correct. Think about it. If I abandon you who just won our match, rumors will begin to spread, saying I took revenge for my defeat. I will be seen as a despicable scoundrel who has betrayed the path of heroism and chivalry!"

"Ah... I see now."

Facing Luo Hao's voluptuous figure, Godou nodded.

It was a declaration that deliberately downplayed the benevolence of her offer. She was truly a person with exceptional pride.

"Of course, I don't plan on being submerged here forever, I will surely find a way to escape... King Kusanagi, in the meantime before I return, you shall have a splendid battle with the Great Sage Equaling Heaven in my stead."

Was this the price of accepting her help? She was now ordering him like a subordinate.

Still, Godou felt troubled. Can this stone prison be as easy to destroy as she said?

"No problem... I've already spoken, I am the one at the Daoist pinnacle, and will surely find this prison's weakness and destroy it . You don't have to worry."

The slight anger of Luo Hao's reproach showed that she had read his concerns.

"Then let's start — Great Sage of the Seven Stars of the Big Dipper, dispel the disaster of the inauspicious spirits!"

Using a beautiful voice melodic like a yueqin[11], Luo Hao chanted the incantation, and took out a rectangular piece of paper. On it was written complicated script along with the six large characters "Ba Gua Zhi Jing Ji Ji"[12], and then she threw this talisman away.

The talisman transformed into a white tiger. Then flying through the air, the ferocious beast attacked Godou.

The white tiger opened its great jaws and the fangs skillfully caught Godou's neck and lifted him. Godou found his body rising continuously.

Within the blink of an eye, he was greatly distanced from the slowly sinking Luo Hao.

"King Kusanagi, I wish you victory. Go fight a battle worthy of a hero."

The transcendent beauty continued to maintain her airs of superiority and spoke these parting words to Godou.

Part 2

In the space of black emptiness, Godou and the white tiger flew upwards.

This probably lasted only a couple dozens of seconds, and he suddenly left the darkness and returned to the surface.

This was the area of Toushouguu Okusha, which had been turned to stone. Having stolen Mariya Hikari's body, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven continued to casually ride his cloud.

On the ground, Liliana was in a battle stance, wielding a glaive that Godou had never seen before, while Erica endured her injuries to hold Cuore di Leone and Lu Yinghua extended his palms.

Their gazes were drawn to the returned Godou.

Having accomplished its mission of bringing Godou back, the white tiger disappeared like a puff of smoke.

"Godou, you came back safely! But where is Her Eminence Luo Hao?"

"She fell down in order to save me, but she said she will escape by her own power."

Godou answered Erica's question simply.

Since he was still in his immobilized condition, the act of speaking took great effort. With an understanding expression, Lu Yinghua nodded at Godou.

"That's very like one of Master's typical excuses. She probably thought that if she abandoned Kusanagi-sama and came back alone, unpleasant rumors would spread about her in the field."

Apparently quite knowledgeable in his master's personality, Lu Yinghua's answer was completely correct.

"Ho — escaping alone? Looks like you guys are just as difficult to handle as I expected."

Sitting on his cloud, the Great Sage began to swing his Ruyi Staff around.

Liliana held her breath and gathered her concentration as she ran over to Godou's side.

"Everyone gather together! We are flying to the foot of the mountain to meet up with Mariya Yuri and the rest!"

She was likely planning on using the technique of high speed [Flight].

But could they really escape? ...One really couldn't expect Sun Wukong's legendary somersault-cloud to be slower than witchcraft . Just as these worries crossed Godou's mind...

"Hmph, trying to escape is futile. Old Sun here is very confident in my lightning speed. Even far into the distance, a hundred and eight thousand li[13] away, I can cover it with a single leap — Hmm!?"

On his cloud, the Great Sage grabbed his knees and screamed as if suffering from an invisible attack.

Though his overwhelming divine power remained, his body was not acting under his control.

"I am not sure what is going on, but here is our chance!"

Seeing the Great Sage undergoing some unexpected change, Liliana held Godou's body in her arms.

Erica and Lu Yinghua also gathered around and the entire group began to fly, surrounded by blue light.

Once the destination was decided, flight magic had to immediately take off and cannot travel to an unfamiliar destination.

Though it had many restrictions, it was still a very convenient magical technique. The group passed through Toushouguu's main and worship halls, then flew over Karamon Gate and the divine stable. From the sky, they could see that Toushouguu, Futarasan Shrine, and Rinnouji's buildings, cedar forest, land, vegetation and springs had all been turned into stone.

As they landed on the visiting path at the foot of the mountain, Yuri and Princess Alice ran over to them.

"Mariya! I'm sorry, Hikari was taken by that monkey... The Great Sage Equaling Heaven stole her body..."

"Yes, I already know. The Princess used ecto — that method to watch Godou-san and Her Eminence's fight, and told me what just happened."

Just as Godou wanted to apologize, Yuri interrupted him.

The Princess skilled in spirit body separation also nodded at him.

"The entire mountain has been invaded by immense divine power as a result of the Great Sage transforming it into a stone prison for sealing Her Eminence Luo Hao and Kusanagi-sama away. If the spell is not dispelled in a few months or perhaps a few years, Her Eminence may very well be trapped forever —"

Alice's words made everyone survey the surroundings where petrification had already reached the foot of the mountain.

This included Toushouguu's entrance torii[14], the five-story pagoda near there, the main visiting path leading to the holy sanctum, the cedar forest, the road made from gravel and soil, as well as the drainage ditch on the side of the road.

Everything within their sight had turned into stone, with Godou's group being the exception.

"But... How come you don't seem worried about your master?"

Erica asked Lu Yinghua.

Everyone else looked worried, but he was the only one untroubled.

"Because she is just imprisoned, not dead. Assuming that is the case, let us gamble and see if Master can find a way to free herself alone."

The proper-looking handsome youth scratched his head with poor manners, and answered with a disinterested tone.

"Oh my. On what basis do you make such a statement?"

"Is there any need? Think about it, if the same had happened to your own king, how would you feel? I think all you Nee-sans will worry, but definitely won't write him off as dead, right? It's the same principle."

Lu Yinghua's explanation surprised Erica, but she smiled wryly, while Liliana and Yuri also looked at each other and nodded with emphasis.

Godou wanted to object. Don't talk like I'm some kind of monster!

"Rather than that, I've been curious about this for a while now... Where have all the people, who were here this evening, gone to now? There were no people at all in the area near Master and Kusanagi-sama's battle."

That's right. Lu Yinghua's observation prompted Godou to ponder.

Just at that moment, he felt a presence approaching.

From the depths of the petrified cedar forest, a group of small animals were approaching — monkeys.

There were almost a hundred of them. Many of the monkeys hid in the petrified tree, and were watching Godou's group from amongst the branches they had climbed onto.

"What's with these guys? Did the Great Sage summon wild monkeys?"

"If he did, then there are too many. I have a bad feeling about this."

The one who responded to Godou and Lu Yinghua's doubts was Yuri, who possessed spirit vision:

"These monkeys... No, they were originally humans, transformed into monkeys by the Great Sage's divine power. I am wondering if they are the tourists and people on the streets who had stayed in Nikkou mountain just now..."

The Hime-Miko explained in a trembling voice. When a [Heretic God] appeared on earth, many supernatural phenomena would occur. Was it the transformation of people into monkeys this time?

As Godou felt speechless, a familiar voice was heard through the pitch dark night.

"People of my kingdom, listen well! My enemy the godslayer and his group have escaped! I will reward well the one who catches them!"

It was Hikari's voice, but clearly the Great Sage from the tone.

The monkeys made a noisy ruckus and turned their gaze to Godou's group, their eyes full of murderous intent.

"If they were to attack, as knights... We cannot hit them recklessly. This is not good."

"Very true, try not to harm them and simply make them lose the ability to fight."

As Erica complained, Liliana spoke gloomily. On the other hand , the other main combatant Lu Yinghua looked very relaxed.

"I won't feel sorrow even if I kill them, but there'd still be a shred of guilt. How about letting me prepare us a car to escape?"

"Prepare? Did you guys come here by car?"

The young master of the Lu family smiled at Godou maliciously .

"Of course not, but right now in the nearby parking lot over there, aren't there many cars with owners who had been turned into monkeys? We can have our free pick. Luckily the Lu family has many subordinates with talents in this area, and I picked up a bit of skill from them. Opening locks and driving are not a problem."

Was this guy really a member of upper class society? The one who cleared this doubt was Erica.

"Perhaps you all have misconceptions about this guy, so let me clarify. It is rumored that the ancestors of the Lu family have roots in triads, or in other words, you can call them the likes of gangsters and robbers directly."

"Really, Erica-neesan, please use something a little more classy like 'heroic outlaws', OK?"

Lu Yinghua quietly laughed to himself.

"Probably like the *Three Heroes and the Five Gallants*[15] or the *Outlaws of the Marsh*[16], those who call themselves heroes or martial artists often had roots as outlaws. Tracing back the exploits of the ancestors, they did take part in activities like "thievery", but the Lu family prides itself for never having a member who turned out to be an evil villain."

"Pretty much along the lines of thieves, bandits, pirates, mounted robbers, highwaymen..."

Regarding this triad member who proudly admitted to his roots , Liliana whispered with an impressed tone:

"Though the current situation is dire, if given a choice we should not deliberately break the law... Erica, I will use flight magic once more. Help me stall for time."

"Got it. Please find us a safe hiding place."

As Erica nodded, Liliana closed her eyes. When using flight magic in unfamiliar lands, it was necessary to use vision spells to confirm the destination.

"Embers cast into the black metal cauldron. May the essence of the red wheel appear above my hand!"

Erica chanted the spell words, and fire surrounded Godou and his group.

The one-meter tall flames blocked the gaze and murderous intent of the monkeys like a wall. This was a move intended to restrain and defend against the monkey army.

A few particularly vigorous monkeys tried to make a leap, but the fire wall's height instantly doubled. Burnt by the red tongues of fire, the monkeys noisily retreated to their group.

"Oh... You realized that my servants are actually your fellow humans? How clever! Then I must prepare even more interesting tricks to handle you guys —"

Hikari's voice once again... No, it was the voice of the Great Sage. He seemed a lot craftier than the average monkey, but did not sound like he was going to attack. Perhaps it was true he couldn't fight personally after all?

As Godou was sent into deep thought, Yuri suddenly tried to survey the surroundings.

"Yuri, did your spirit vision see something?"

"Yes, that is correct, Erica-san! Something very dangerous is approaching, a threat that requires high alert, it should be here immediately — everyone, look up!"

Godou turned his gaze upwards and had a great shock.

A monkey was descending from the pitch black darkness of the sky, its fur having a copper color with a shade of orange, with the body size far exceeding normal monkeys. Crash! A massive noise reverberated and the ground shook as it landed.

Descending upon the main visiting path, this monkey was taller than normal cedar trees.

Roughly twelve, thirteen meters in height, it had a strongly-built physique, long arms and short legs, and a stout and giant body resembling something in between a gorilla or an ape.

Erica's wall of flames was likely useless against this guy.

"This is not like the monkeys we met just now — it's a divine beast! A divine monkey beast that serves the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, with strength that probably rivals dragons, and unimaginably powerful!"

Warned by Erica, Godou looked at Liliana.

The silver-haired knight had closed her eyes, but the flight magic was not yet ready.

Yet another giant monkey fell from the sky. Even for Erica and the rest, divine beasts were challenging opponents. For two enemies like that to appear, it looked like they had entered a most desperate crisis.

Part 3

As the stony ground shook beneath their feet, the two monkeys approached Godou's group.

Lu Yinghua watched them and said:

"Looks like a deadly battle is unavoidable. Kusanagi-sama, I will attack first to attract their attention. Please use this opportunity to escape."

"Wait a minute, I can't let someone I met the first time today do me a favor like that!"

"That's not how it goes. If Kusanagi-san came back in Master's stead, then you are currently her representative. If I don't display my utmost loyalty to you, then I will be punished sooner or later most severely. Think of it as self-preservation."

Godou suddenly began to pity the youth who spoke such words. On further thought, since that woman was his master, he must have led a hard life all these years.

But after seeing Lu Yinghua's detestable smiling face, he immediately changed his mind.

"Besides, as the disciple of Luo Cuilian, I'm not used to fighting with burdens to take care of. So let me fight my battle alone — Nee-san, is this acceptable? I believe none of you here are arrogant enough to think you can keep up with my speed?"

Hearing his audacious words, both female knights nodded reluctantly.

To have the courage and capability to make such boasts to the two genius great knight prodigies, truly, it was a case of 'like master, like disciple.' Godou felt that somehow the master-disciple pair suited each other very well.

Having made clear his intentions, the youth leaped towards the petrified forest, his motions like a bird gliding on its wings. This served the role of an attractive beacon for these monkeys.

The members of the monkey army, whose heights ranged from half a meter up to a full meter, began to pounce after the youth. As wild beasts, these monkeys surpassed normal humans by far in athletic ability despite their small size, and also had sharp claws and fangs.

However, Lu Yinghua was even faster and more agile than the monkeys.

Moving conspicuously through the cedar branches, he nimbly evaded the monkey army's attack. He even used his skill of Tanzhishentong[17] to flick his index and middle fingers to attack the monkeys' foreheads or abdomens. Monkeys that suffered his attacks either fainted or collapsed painfully, struggling as they vomited.

One of the two giant monkeys began to move after Lu Yinghua, its attention captured by his conspicuous movements.

It made a beeline for the youth, forcing its way and pushing down cedar trees. The little monkeys scattered away like spiders in its wake.

Finally, the giant ape reached out with its very long arm, intent on capturing its prey.

Lu Yinghua lightly jumped to a branch on the neighboring tree. While holding the giant ape's attention, he moved between branches like a squirrel and immediately disappeared into the depths of the forest.

The giant ape casually brushed aside the trees (which were now equivalent to stone pillars) as it gave chase.

Its massive body, over ten meters tall, ran like the violent winds of a storm, gradually destroying the petrified cedar forest in its wake with destructive power equivalent to a typhoon. Furthermore, another one of these giant apes still remained near Godou's group.

"Light from the East, show me your mysterious power!"

Princess Alice suddenly chanted spell words and aimed her palm at the remaining giant ape.

An intense flash of light shot forth from her palm, burning the giant ape's eyes.

ROOOOOAAAAR! The giant ape's howls echoed in the surroundings.

"A-Alice-san! What was that move just now?"

"The sacred miko's blessing of light to drive off enemies. In a fight against divine beasts, it's only effective as a distraction, but used as a farewell greeting, it is more than enough."

The one who called herself a princess carried herself with elegance and calm.

The massive monkey nearby was waving its arms and legs attacking randomly, screaming strenuously. Princess Alice's courage sure was outstanding.

"Just like what that child said just now, we'd better get going. Kusanagi-sama, even though you are a devil king Campione, you need rest in your current state."

Godou nodded in agreement. Right now, his body was covered with wounds.

Even without the side effects of the [Raptor], the injuries caused by Luo Hao's attacks were enough to immobilize him.

"I really would have wanted to watch the outcome of this commotion... But I regret to say, Cinderella's curfew has arrived."

The blonde beauty smiled.

"Since too much magical power has been exhausted, this body will run out of energy soon. I have to return my consciousness to my true body to rest. The next time I can visit you all... Would most likely be a few days later."

In other words, she had flown over here from her home in London using something like ectoplasm or a psychic projection.

Enduring his stiff body, Godou nodded firmly to her.

"I understand. I will handle everything here properly. Please take your rest, I am really grateful to you for today."

"Not at all, the honor is all mine. I feel very fortunate for the opportunity to find out what kind of person you are."

Alice deliberately winked humorously.

"Ah, by the way, I would like to make a request to Erica and the rest. Please keep our meeting a secret. Likewise, I will keep all manners of Kusanagi-sama's secrets."

Hearing this request that sounded like a joke, Erica gracefully bowed. Having found her destination, Liliana also opened her eyes and respectfully bowed to Princess Alice.

Like paying respects to a noble lady, was Princess Alice's true identity some kind of upper class noblewoman? Just as Godou puzzled, the princess suddenly vanished.

"So just now, that was spirit body separation!?"

"Now that it's mentioned, Uncle did tell me once, the Princess was a sage who couldn't be judged on the surface, and had all sorts of trump cards hidden up her sleeves..."

Liliana spoke what she noticed, while Erica exclaimed with great emotion.

In total, the current members of the group were the blue and red great knights, Mariya Yuri and Kusanagi Godou.

"Uh, isn't this our usual group?"

Godou couldn't help commenting about the three girls before him.

ROOAAR! Its sight apparently recovered, the giant ape charged straight at them.

"Lily!"

"I know, come closer Mariya Yuri! We are about to take off!"

"Yes, right."

Urged by Erica, Liliana instructed Yuri who did as she was told and came closer. The blue light covered them once again. This was the second time they used flight magic that day.

Flying once again, the entire petrified holy sanctum was beneath them in an instant.

Seeing the target had escaped, the giant ape and the small monkeys nearby roared. The other giant ape that had been crashing through the forest in pursuit of Lu Yinghua, also began to roar as well.

For an instant, Godou saw Mariya Hikari whose body had been taken by the Great Sage.

"Namo ratnatrayaya, namah arya, avalokitesvaraya, bodhisattvaya, mahasattvaya, mahakarunikaya."[18]

It sounded like some sort of Buddhist prayer. That's right, it was Hikari — the Great Sage's voice.

What effect do these spell words have? Godou felt an ominous feeling in the depths of his heart.

The injured Campione continued flying, riding upon the blue light.

Sun Wukong was the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, unparalleled in his ability to fly. Under normal conditions, he would have intercepted and struck them down — but at this moment all the Great Sage could do was gnash his teeth in anguish , chanting spell words at the same time.

Although he had recovered overwhelming divine power, the body was not listening to him.

In possessing the body of the miko with powers of disaster purification, one never expected to fall into such a trap...

But having obtained this rare ability it should not be wasted, thought the Great Sage as he focused single-mindedly on chanting

the spell words. With the current level of divine power, that particular spell — the grand technique that posed great difficulty even for a warlord of [Steel] like himself, should be usable.

In order to make the Great Sage Equaling Heaven complete once more, it would be better to finish the current task rather than seek out battle for now.

Part 4

Amakasu Touma's talents were concentrated in the combination of ninjutsu and wizardry techniques of onmyoudou[19] and shugendou.[20]

He was not a spellcaster with a high pedigree like Mariya Yuri or Seishuuin Ena.

Though his family had deep roots in wizardry, their past was enshrouded in dark activities such as espionage or worse, and were descendants of evil wizards. Compared to staying together with everyone like an RPG party, his skills and preferences were more suited to acting alone.

The art of concealment — a wizardry technique for camouflaging oneself and becoming one with the environment.

Highly skilled in this technique, Amakasu Touma hid himself as he observed the battle at Toushouguu, the disappearance of Lu Yinghua into the forest, the departure of Princess Alice, and the flying escape of Godou and the girls.

Subsequently, roughly a hundred monkeys or more started to take action, advancing towards the west of Toushouguu.

The group of monkeys moved along a national route called Romantic Road. They were making their way towards the Nikkou mountain range where Nantaisan was at the forefront. The giant apes that had attacked Godou's group also travelled in the same direction.

Bending their knees deeply and jumping with great force, they leaped through the air like shooting stars.

As befitting the name of divine beasts, they were amazingly nimble despite their ten-meter-tall frames.

"Kusanagi-san and his group were fleeing north... So these monkeys are not chasing after them. Are they intending on migrating to some place to establish a base of operations?"

Amakasu muttered to himself.

All the shopkeepers, tourists and shrine personnel around Toushouguu seemed to have turned into monkeys, and now the only human left was Amakasu.

"Namo ratnatrayaya, namah arya, avalokitesvaraya, bodhisattvaya, mahasattvaya, mahakarunikaya."

The words of the dharani[21] could be heard, carried by the wind.

Dharani was a name for Buddhist wizardry and incantations. The underlings had left, but their king the Great Sage still remained in this place chanting the dharani.

What was his purpose? Leaving Toushouguu, Amakasu walked towards the streets of Nikkou city.

Nikkou Toushouguu was very close to the station, and around twenty minutes away by foot. Amakasu surveyed his surroundings there.

Then he jumped from rooftop to rooftop. This was the physical skill that Templar Knights like Erica called [Leap], Chinese martial artists called [Qinggong], while users like Amakasu called it [Monkey Flight]. Though he wasn't on the level of Lu Yinghua or Seishuuin Ena, his steps were still superhumanly agile.

"No other obvious changes... Perhaps the Great Sage's power of domination does not extend that far after all? Or he hasn't shown his true skills yet..."

There were roughly six thousand inhabitants living in the quaint city of Nikkou.

Due to the people and cars out and about, the calm and peaceful streets looked a little bustling. There were no incidents of people suddenly transforming into monkeys, or pitiful scenes of people screaming their heads off. It was just the scene of a normal Saturday night on the first day of a three-day long weekend.

Leaving the station, Amakasu made his way back towards Toushouguu.

He ran like the wind along the river bank of the Daiyagawa until he saw the vermilion bridge.

The famous Shinkyou was a wooden arch bridge built over the Daiyagawa. Lacquered with bright vermilion, it was very eye-catching at night.

Apparently, the only people turned into monkeys were the ones around Toushouguu.

Having confirmed the situation, Amakasu stood on the edge of the Shinkyou and took out his cellphone.

'—That's all. This is the general situation in the surrounding area.'

"Understood. So the monkey divine monarch used Hikari to recover the divinity of Sun Wukong and then created subordinates . This is not a good situation at all... So why didn't you turn into a monkey as well, Amakasu?"

On the back seat of a very unassuming car without distinguishable features that was racing along the highway, Sayanomiya Kaoru was listening to the report of her trusted subordinate.

'Hmm, not only me but Erica-san, Yuri-san and Liliana-san as well, none of us were changed into monkeys. Most likely those

with a certain level of magical power resisted the monkey transformation.'

"So, what happened to those involved with the Committee at Nikkou?"

'I didn't see them. If they were fine, they should have taken action already, so it would not be wrong to assume they have been turned into monkeys.'

"If we send reinforcements, they will need to be Hime-Miko or agents on your level, right?"

'Yes. Gather all the master-level instructors near the Imperial Capital[22], and organize an emergency gathering of related personnel from the Kantou region[23], then contact the higher-ups of the spell department to call in the wizards. Also, we need to inform Tochigi Prefecture's police department and government bureaus like the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism... And then after that...'

"Yes, it looks like a dangerous crisis, so using a trump card directly is also a plan."

Kaoru's gaze turned to the premier Hime-Miko beside her.

In order to gather strength for the upcoming battle, Seishuuin Ena was sleeping soundly while embracing the Japanese sword taken out from the storeroom of the Sayanomiya residence. Kaoru's original intention was to have her stationed near Utsunomiya[24], to be used as a free chess piece...

'That's right, against divine beasts that are like giant UMA monsters, I think it is better to concentrate our firepower rather than being stingy with our combat potential.'

"Thank you for your valuable opinion, I will take it into consideration."

'Not at all, you're welcome. I'll be going back to work.'

Kaoru hung up the cellphone and greeted Ena who had already woken up some time earlier.

"Hikari has been captured by the Great Sage Equaling Heaven?"

"Ena, your hearing is acute as ever."

Even while sleeping, she was still listening. Kaoru could not help but smile wryly.

"However, it would be a great help if you enter the fray, so Ena, what do you think? Divine beasts have appeared and Kusanagi-san's group is in a crisis. Do you have the confidence to penetrate into the battlefield and perform even better than Erica-san and the rest?"

The cross-dressing Hime-Miko smiled at the corner of her lips. Though it frequently surprised people when they found out, Kaoru was a talented polymath. Whether in the area of martial arts or the spirit powers of a Hime-Miko, only one person had been able to surpass her.

"Of course, Erica-san is very smart and Liliana-san is very talented at witchcraft. However, in a battle of pure strength, Ena will always be the final winner."

The premier Hime-Miko was the only person to surpass Kaoru in spellcraft and swordsmanship.

Having heard the strongest trump card make her bold guarantee, Kaoru adjusted her battle strategy.

Amakasu ended his report to his boss and switched off the cellphone.

It was almost time for him to make an appearance at Kusanagi Godou's place, and he also needed to confirm the condition of Mariya Hikari — the apprentice Hime-Miko whose body had been possessed by the monkey divine monarch who should now be called the Great Sage Equaling Heaven.

He had to judge the feasibility of rescuing or abandoning her. However, that particular devil king probably won't recognize any option other than the first...

As Amakasu smiled wryly, he found a rather alarming sudden change.

Before his eyes was the bridge of Shinkyou that was lacquered vermilion.

Nikkou was originally the training grounds for the monks in the mountains and a holy place linked to the sacred peaks of Emei. [25] The scenery of the Daiyagawa river flowing through here normally gave off an atmosphere like deep mountains and secluded valleys, but the volume of water was continuously increasing right now.

With Lake Chuuzenji as its source, the Daiyagawa was a beautiful stream, but that description completely failed to describe the current volume of water.

The river water was currently gushing loudly as if flooded after a massive rainstorm. What on earth happened?

Amakasu reflexively surveyed the surroundings.

The first time a bridge was erected here was over a thousand years ago. It was said that during the Heian period, Great Monk Shoudou[26] was opening up the uninhabited Nikkou and Nantaisan mountains, and supernatural entities built this bridge for him. Shinkyou is the legacy to the world that brings the legend to life.

"Namo ratnatrayaya, namah arya, avalokitesvaraya, bodhisattvaya, mahasattvaya, mahakarunikaya."

Amakasu heard Mariya Hikari's voice.

"Om, sarva bhava samudram sosana karana. sarva vyadhi prasamana karaya."

The Great Sage continued to chant, and soon enough, a nude male floated onto the surface of the Daiyagawa river.

His skin was very black and he had a very thin build like a sick person's.

His face was like a demon's, with bloodshot sharp-looking eyes that flashed brightly and sharp fangs protruded from the two sides of his great gaping mouth.

The legend of Great Monk Shoudou told that, back when the strong currents of the Daiyagawa had blocked his path to enter Nikkou, the haggard monk made a prayer. A spirit then appeared on the opposite bank and began constructing a bridge across the river. This was how the Shinkyou came about.

Afterwards, Great Monk Shoudou gave a name to this spirit, and that was —

"General of the Deep Sands!? In other words, this is no longer a crisis on the level of divine beasts!"

In the moment of Amakasu's shock, the black wrathful spirit roared loudly.

Ooooooooooooooh!

The cry of a [Heretic God]'s birth was a response to the Great Sage's dharani.

As if answering this roar, the waters of the Daiyagawa River rapidly flooded.

Like a massive flood, the rushing flow swept down from upstream, easily smashing the Shinkyo bridge, and Amakasu too was swallowed by the torrent.

Chapter 2 - The Three Spirits, Reunited on Wakoku's[27] Sacred Mountain

Part 1

Kirifuri Plateau was about a few dozens of minutes away from the streets of Nikkou City by car.

These highlands were blessed with natural scenery such as Mount Akanagi and Mount Maru, as well as the beautiful Kirifuri River. Other than hiking routes, there were also ski resorts, ranches, golf courses and other facilities.

Godou and his group had escaped to camping grounds in the area of Kirifuri Plateau.

"Ouch. It still hurts a lot..."

Godou complained as he sat on a wooden chair on the porch of a little wooden cabin.

This was a camp site on the plateau. The aroma of nearby outdoor cooking wafted over. Almost all the tourists who came traveling as a family, as well as Liliana and Yuri, were making dinner.

Gazing up, one could see the beautiful autumn constellations twinkling in the night sky.

Despite the beauty of the scenery, Godou was still in a bad mood.

He had taken a great deal of damage during the fight against Luo Hao. A normal person would have died instantly from several dozen instances of broken bones and a couple cases of ruptured internal organs. Godou's entire body was hurting like crazy, and he felt nauseous a couple of times.

Most of all, he worried about Mariya Hikari.

Being possessed by the Great Sage made her a hostage. He really wanted to go save her straight away, however —

"With my current grave injuries, there's probably no way..."

Godou sighed.

His earlier self would have rushed in recklessly to save Hikari without a second thought.

But Godou had already become accustomed to these kinds of crises.

Anyway, how could he prove that Mariya Hikari was currently the Great Sage Equaling Heaven? What could he do to drive the deity out from inside her body? How should he handle the terrifying divine power he had just witnessed?

There were too many problems. What he had to do now was to find answers to them.

Since Luo Hao was not present, the only one here who could save Hikari was Kusanagi Godou. As a man in this situation, if he were to lose control to his emotions, that would be unforgivable stupidity.

Warned by his sense of reason and responsibility... Godou was determined to adhere to those principles.

However, he hated his current self who was weighing trade-offs rationally, and would rather act according to his emotions. If he was just an ordinary person living a peaceful life, panicking should be the normal reaction to a situation like this...

"Right, let me call Sayanomiya-san and see."

Godou suppressed his self-revulsion, and took out his cellphone .

What he needed the most right now was information. Dialing the number recorded in his contacts, the call immediately connected.

'Wonderful, I was just about to contact you first. By the way, I already know all about the outcome of your battle with that Cult Leader, as well as what happened afterwards, so you don't need to explain.'

"Could it be Amakasu-san who told you?"

Godou made his deduction from Sayanomiya's words.

That ninja descendant would definitely report important news like this, so there was nothing to be surprised about.

'You are correct... But I lost contact with him an hour ago. I am currently discussing with my subordinates whether to list him as Missing In Action.'

The History Compilation Committee Tokyo Branch Chief, who was also a Hime-Miko, spoke softly in a slightly gloomy tone.

'Thanks to him, I'll have to come personally to Nikkou. So, Kusanagi-san, we will meet tomorrow morning. Please rest properly and conserve your energy for now. Whenever a god makes an appearance, Campiones are mankind's only saviors.'

"Sayanomiya-san will be coming here as well?"

'If Amakasu was around, I would have him on standby near Utsunomiya so that I can make decisions based on his reports about the developing situation. After all, with regard to news from the scene, the more accurate the better.'

It seemed like Amakasu was greatly trusted by his boss.

Rather than listen to the report of someone else apart from him, Kaoru preferred going to the scene herself.

'I am now summoning the personnel for the expedition to Nikkou. Oh by the way, Ena will be arriving at the scene first, so she will be meeting Kusanagi-san over there.'

"It's Seishuuin!"

'Yes. I suspect she will likely wander around first rather than show up at your place immediately. However, she is a girl with very strong instincts, so she will surely make her appearance at a suitable time. Also, the handling of Hikari will be up to your decision. Whatever choice you make, I will bear complete responsibility.'

"What you mean is... It's fine even if I give up on her?"

Godou could not stop himself from uttering such cold words.

At this particular moment, he felt the same revulsion for Kaoru as he felt towards himself just now.

'Put it another way... If you were to ignore the plights of innocent citizens whose only wish is to live peacefully, or even sacrifice them to save Hikari, we will follow your orders... Kusanagi-san, this is a special right and responsibility that only you are entitled to.'

"Special right and responsibility?"

'Yes, perhaps you can call it a king's job, in other words, the right to make decisions.'

Godou finally understood what Kaoru wanted to tell him.

The manner in which the incident should be resolved was entirely up to Godou's decision, because a Campione was not only a warrior, but also a [King] whose power lorded over the world.

Entrusted with the heavy responsibility of the right to make decisions, Godou ended the phone call.

"Godou-san, dinner is ready."

Yuri had returned to the porch to call for Godou.

She had changed out of her miko outfit into a long-sleeved shirt and a flounced skirt. With goodness knows what kind of magic, the girls had somehow managed to retrieve the luggage they had left in Amakasu's car.

"Got it, Mariya. About the matter of Hikari..."

"Regarding that matter, actually I discussed it with Erica-san and Liliana-san just now. Since Hikari was using the power of disaster purification to neutralize the Great Sage's [Keeper of the Horses] spell, she should be very safe. After all, it is the Great Sage himself who is protecting her now..."

Yuri replied in a resolute and clear manner.

"Therefore, Erica-san and Liliana-san both agree that Godou-san should not anxiously make a rash decision. As a Hime-Miko, I also approve of their opinions."

Her words were full of righteous awe and responsibility, as befitting Yuri's title of "Hime."

Yuri was not the least shaken by her younger sister's crisis. Wait a minute... Was she really completely unmoved? It was possible she was only pretending to be composed.

"Now that you mention it, where is that fellow Erica?"

"Chatting with the people who provided the camping grounds for us to use... She has already become very popular with them. It is very amazing of her, right? As soon as I mentioned to her we needed to prepare dinner, she helped me obtain the fish and meat we needed, and even got us dessert and fruit as well."

Unlike the area around Toushouguu, it was very peaceful here. Erica was apparently flexing her skillful diplomacy as usual.

"I see... That fellow's wounds are pretty much healed by now? I'm glad to know that."

Erica's injuries were definitely not light, but the healing magic had apparently worked its effect.

However, Yuri frowned at this moment.

"By 'that fellow' you must be referring to Erica-san? Does that mean Godou-san you still have not fully recovered?"

"Ah? No, I'm almost fine, you don't have to worry."

Noticing his mistake, Godou frantically tried to tide things over.

"No lying. Why are you trying to pretend you are well?"

"This question... How should I put it..."

Yuri's lips were shimmering with a colorful hue of pink as she questioned.

Godou's vivid memories began to reawaken. He recalled the healing she had provided during the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi incident, as well as just now when she transferred knowledge for him to defeat Luo Hao.

If Godou revealed the present poor condition of his body, she would likely use "that method" to heal him!

"K-Kusanagi-san! A-As a Hime-Miko, though I have the duty to assist you..."

Yuri was apparently thinking of the same thing, and her highly respectable face turned bright red.

"However... My indulgence in those actions multiple times, still feels repulsive to a certain extent, making me hesitant in a number of areas..."

"You are completely right. Yes, I understand!"

Wonderful, it looked like *that* could be avoided... Just as Godou felt relieved, Yuri immediately declared rather problematically.

"However... If you are really in pain... I would still like to offer my power to assist you. All things considered, you were hurt for the sake of my younger sister, and for the both of us. If I can help you after all, I will still..."

Yuri shyly lowered her gaze, but she was actually trying to convince herself.

Though she was so embarrassed that even her neck was red, Yuri still said it out loud.

"After all, I... still want to...with you..."

Godou swallowed hard. Yuri's stuttering made her even more charming than her angry appearance earlier.

Of course he wanted to accept treatment if possible, but Godou couldn't let himself force her to do that sort of thing. Absolutely not. With mixed feelings, Godou fell silent.

How did Yuri interpret Godou's silence?

Yuri's expression went through agonizing, doubt and hesitation . Then she spoke softly:

"We... We will be seen here, but I will not mind if we go over there..."

Yuri whispered softly as she glanced into the wooden cabin.

Hmm!? The meaning of her words turned out to be — Godou was completely speechless.

"Please wait a minute? How can you keep burdening poor Yuri with such tasks, it's a bit unfair, oh? It is now time to assign areas of responsibility properly in a fair manner."

"Erica-san!?"

Unbeknownst to them, the [Diavolo Rosso] had begun standing outside the porch.

Erica's red-tinged brilliant blonde hair was like a crown. As Godou stared back at her usual glamor, he somehow felt a sense of fright with a guilty conscience.

"I believe that whether I or Yuri, both of us need to evenly proportion the time to enjoy our love with Godou. After all, if unfairness is not corrected, it could very well affect the harmony of the group. Say, Yuri, you've already done a lot of things with Godou today, right?"

"—!? Erica-san, why are you suddenly asking such a thing?"

Forthcoming and inexperienced in the ways of the world, Yuri was a terrible liar. She did not even attempt a perfunctory answer, and easily admitted to the accusation.

"This is an equation that even a primary school student can solve. Since Godou used the [Sword] in the fight against Luo Hao, who gave him the knowledge? There was only one person with the opportunity to do so today."

"Y-Yes that is very true..."

"So it should be enough for today, right? Please let me have this rare opportunity to affirm my love with Godou. As for next time, no question about it, I will let Yuri have first priority —"

What on earth was she saying in front of the primary subject!?

Godou frantically jumped up from his chair, intending to escape .

Silently, Erica drew near and pressed down on his shoulder. Though it seemed like she was simply resting her arm gracefully, the weight applied was terrifying. As usual, she was using her monstrous strength.

"Godou, sorry you had to wait for so long. Now that the conclusion is clear, let us enjoy our passionate moment together? Hoho, it's been quite a while since I last affirmed your tactile sensations like this."

A seductive smile appeared on Erica's face as she sat on Godou's knees.

The soft and gentle sensation from his knees delivered to Godou a very comfortable sense of weight and pressure.

"Come, relax. I will help heal your injuries right away."

Erica whispered softly as she leaned against him. Of course, her body also pressed against Godou's chest, and Erica's voluptuous bosom felt like elastic balls being squeezed between them.

"Hey, could you actually be intending to do that here!? Mariya is watching right over there!"

"You are correct. Strike while the iron is hot. Before you change your mind..."

"That issue never existed! I had no mood to do these things from the very beginning — wah!"

In the end, Erica's cherry lips sealed his mouth.

Perhaps due to the lipstick she wore today, Erica's lips had a smooth and shiny feeling to them, and the taste was accompanied with much viscosity.

The blonde beauty bit and licked Godou's lips and their tongues began to tangle. The two of them exchanged saliva naturally, which mixed within their mouths. The sticky lipstick also began to be rubbed off.

"By the way, Godou, I hope you take more initiative in kissing me in the future. Though this is nice, I still love your unruliness last time. Hoho... Actually, every time I recall what happened then, my heart begins to race, I beg you, please..."

As her kissing descended without pause like rain with great playfulness, Erica begged Godou as if wanting to be spoiled.

Her eyes were relaxed as if intoxicated, unlike their usual sharp and intelligent appearance. This rare facial expression, full of vulnerability, carried an unbearable sense of loveliness. However, this meant Godou was failing in his original goal —

Catching Yuri in the corner of his eye, Godou found her mournfully lowering her gaze.

No! Godou forcefully shoved Erica away, escaping from the confines of her sweet embrace.

"Godou, the healing spell is not complete, what are you doing!?"

"I-It is not necessary. I still feel this is not very appropriate. For the sake of battle, to engage in these activities so many times, that's ... Kissing is not good."

"How could you still say that at this point? Didn't you ask me to swear eternal loyalty to you last time?"

Erica's reproach made Godou lower his gaze. Having said those words in the heat of the moment that time... It was a painful memory that continued to trouble him. Worst of all was Yuri's current shock at the matter.

"Eh? Eternal loyalty? What on earth is that about...?"

"Come to think of it, I don't think I mentioned it to Yuri yet."

Chuckling "hoho" to herself, Erica smiled triumphantly and answered Yuri with an intoxicated expression in her eyes:

"Godou was really a piece of work. He made me say something like this. Even if the world was about to be destroyed, I had to swear to stay by his side through life and death. Godou that time was very rough, very gallant, but also very charming. Even though I like the usual Godou very much, that kind of aggression is great once in a while."

"G-Godou-san! When did you and Erica-san...!"

"You people are so noisy... What on earth are you arguing about ?"

Just as the troubled expression Yuri made a few days ago at Nanao Shrine appeared on her face once again, an awe-inspiring voice and the fragrance of spices drifted over.

Liliana had appeared, carrying the newly prepared curry.

"Nothing, umm... Actually, it's no big deal..."

Erica turned her face away, while Yuri became frantic, and only Godou was left to attempt an explanation.

After hearing the gist of the situation, Liliana couldn't help but sigh.

"Really... The matter of women entering into conflict over your affections, was exactly what I have been worrying about. As expected, it is imperative for me to stay by your side as your premier knight and assist you."

Liliana warned Godou with the same kind of tone as a wife would reproach an unfaithful husband.

"So, I have a great idea to solve this dispute here. Would you all like to listen?"

"Yes, please tell me, thanks."

Godou nodded.

Perhaps the witch Liliana could have some other method to apply magic to a Campione without needing mouth to mouth contact. Godou was filled with anticipation.

"I believe in situations like this, I should be the one kissing you to apply the healing magic. If you do not wish to see your lovers engaging in a quarrel over such a task, then let me do it as your premier knight. This is the one and only, and at the same time, best solution."

"That totally doesn't solve anything!"

Godou resolutely refused the loyal and capable, but frequently unpredictable knight.

Part 2

In the end, Godou went directly to dinner without accepting anyone's healing.

Godou decided to just endure it, since he should be fine after a good night's rest as usual.

The night's dishes included typical outdoor campsite cooking such as curry rice and barbecued meat. There was also fish that Erica brought back which were made into salt roasted salmon and rainbow trout. Along with boiled mountain vegetables, the assortment of dishes was quite a varied offering. They decided to have dinner outside instead of inside the wooden cabin.

Though they did not pick this place for the fun of eating outdoors, it turned out to be a way to increase the enjoyment of the meal.

Despite the delicious cooking, Godou's spirits remained low.

All would be well if he could handle things alone and put in all his effort. However, in a battle against the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong, there was the problem of whom he should kiss to obtain the knowledge required for the godslaying [Sword].

Previous incidents were all sudden emergencies that left him no choice but to take the lips of young girls by force.

This time was different. In the near future, a battle with the Great Sage was imminent, and preparations had to be made in advance. Should he ask Erica, Yuri or Liliana? What words could he say to allow them to act without being forced...?

Perhaps infected by Godou's melancholy, the dinner atmosphere was very quiet.

"Everyone should be full now, so let's begin discussing the real issue?"

At such a time, the only one capable of actively changing the mood was Erica.

"Victory could likely be very simple against the Great Sage... I believe so. What does everyone think?"

"Is it because of the fact that he suddenly stopped when he could have given me a finishing blow?"

Realizing what Erica was getting at, Godou offered his input.

"Yes, for the Great Sage, it was a rare opportunity to kill a Campione without breaking a sweat. But he suddenly gave up."

"It was definitely unnatural. He had no reason to show mercy at that time."

Recalling her memories from a few hours ago, Liliana could not help frowning.

"The first possibility that comes to mind, is that he is having trouble with his body. It bears mentioning that the Great Sage chose to steal Hikari's body in order to neutralize the [Keeper of the Horses]'s binding spell."

The one who presented her opinion was Mariya Yuri, the older sister of the possessed Hikari.

"In this case, Hikari's spirit powers have limits. Since she does not have the ability to completely dispel the great wizardry that seals the deity, her power is steadily consumed to maintain the effect. Once her body becomes too tired and unable to use disaster purification, would the Great Sage not be affected by the [Keeper of the Horses] once again?"

"That's right, which is why he avoided a battle with Godou. I don't think this speculation is over optimistic. It is a sound theory."

Erica spoke to sum up Yuri's speculation.

"But no matter how the situation develops, if Godou wants to defeat the Great Sage, the [Sword]'s spell words will be essential. Here lies the problem. Liliana and I are both unclear on the details of the divinity of the Great Sage as a Chinese deity. How about you, Yuri?"

"I too, only know the basics and none of the details..."

"If that's the case, then Mariya Yuri's spirit vision is our only hope to discern the true nature of that war god?"

Liliana pondered deeply with a troubled expression.

It was said that whether spirit vision succeeds in receiving divine insight was entirely up to fate. However, Yuri did possess outstanding spirit vision powers, and had great success rates in seeing through the true nature of gods. On the other hand, there was no guarantee in the timing of visions, which could be five minutes or even five years later.

"In all instances so far when I was able to discern a deity's true nature, it was always in the presence of a god or a Campione. Like the battles with Marquis Voban or Her Eminence Luo Hao, so this time I should be able to..."

Yuri spoke quietly with great resolution.

She usually did not employ her spirit vision with such fervor and initiative, but this time was different. Obviously it was

because she was trying hard to save her sister. Godou also felt that he had to help her with all his strength.

However, Godou was still agonizing about the required ritual to receive knowledge about the Great Sage's divinity.

"By the way... Why can a monkey become [Steel]?"

In order to steer his thoughts away from the magical union, Godou raised the question that had occupied his mind since the day time.

...With an inevitable confrontation against a deity, he no longer had the luxury of indulging his little wish of avoiding learning trivia about gods. Troublesome things sure had no end to them.

"Well... In Europe when wild beasts with the deepest connections to [Steel] are mentioned, dragons and snakes inevitably come up."

Liliana answered thoughtfully, and Erica nodded and agreed.

"That's right, it was quite clear from the case of Perseus. A hero of [Steel] is a warrior god who subdues a dragon or a snake, taking its power. But there shouldn't be any examples related to monkeys. "

"Precisely because he subdued dragons and snakes, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven became the monkey god."

The one who spoke was the Japanese Hime-Miko Yuri.

"During the daytime at Toushouguu's divine stable, it was already mentioned that Japan and China had ancient legends about monkeys keeping watch over horses. Dragons and horses are actually extremely related existences, as evidenced by the ancient practice of calling exceptional stallions 'Dragon Horses.' Hence there is a saying that 'the heavenly horse and the divine dragon are one of a kind. Now that the horse has come today, a dragon's visit is imminent.'[28]"

In other words, there was the possibility that dragons and horses were interchangeable. Liliana interrupted.

"Though in different forms, dragons existed in both the east and the west. Do you all know why? It is because this sacred beast originated in Central Asia and the original prototypes were virtually the same in appearance. The European dragon's prototype is the ancient Sumerian dragon; that one is a classic. If we trace back the origins of the Chinese dragon, its appearance should also resemble the Sumerian dragon."

"Could it be... similar to a horse?"

"Yes, back in ancient times, the dragon's appearance was once described as 'a horse with horns.' As time went on, its image assimilated the [Snake], a symbol of mother earth deities, thus obtaining the scaly and slender body along with the shortened limbs. In the west, the dragon further received wings while its limbs became extremely short in the east, resulting in the current appearances."

Dragons and snakes were originally unrelated species. Perhaps it was their shared fate of being vanquished by heroes of [Steel] that caused them to somehow evolve into close relatives. Thus Liliana concluded.

"Speaking of the Great Sage, *Journey to the West* bears mentioning... You all might think that he is just a character that appears in the story, but in reality, he was a deity with a long history that is an amalgamation of all sorts of faiths and heritages. The legend of his journey accompanying the monk Sanzang[29] to bring back Buddhist scriptures, had spread to Japan at a very early age, and can even be found in Noh[30] plays."

Godou was very surprised by the things Yuri mentioned.

"Noh plays? You mean the likes of Kanami[31] and Zeami[32]?"

"Correct. The plays *Great Prajñā*[33] and *Sanzou the Monk* are thought to have existed during Zeami's time."

Just as Godou began to feel that Sun Wukong was very troublesome, Erica also began to speak.

"Anyway, let's end the optimistic speculation here. It's time we discuss the pessimistic scenario? Regarding Hikari who has been possessed by the Great Sage."

"You mean the case where she cannot be saved?"

The meaning exactly described by the label of "pessimistic." This was the question Sayanomiya Kaoru hinted at earlier.

Hikari's physical body was under complete control of the Great Sage. Could she be rescued by defeating that monkey god? Was this solution actually feasible...

"Yes. Admittedly, she is adorable, and I really look forward to her future possibilities. Personally I would want to rescue her no matter what, but the History Compilation Committee doesn't think so, right?"

"Yes, Sayanomiya-san did mention that in the worst case scenario, I can choose to abandon that child."

"That's right, I would have made the same decision if I were a core leader in the Committee. If Godou insists on rescuing Mariya Hikari, he cannot fight the Great Sage seriously, and this has severe consequences. Put it another way, if sacrificing just one girl allowed the defeat of a [Heretic God], it is actually a very cheap price to pay."

Erica's expression was very solemn. She likely brought up this issue to make sure priorities were straight even in the direst of situations. At the same time, she wanted to confirm the preparedness of Godou's determination.

Liliana frowned while Yuri listened with a worried expression. Erica's wording was an argument that Liliana could not possibly accept as a noble knight. For Mariya Yuri, it was like saying abandoning her younger sister was the best course of action.

As Godou entered into deep thought, Erica relaxed her shoulders and smiled.

"Relax, everyone. That was just the worst case scenario. We haven't even begun the battle against Great Sage, so worrying at this point is meaningless. Let's all rest for today. Our first priority is to save enough energy for the fight tomorrow."

Part 3

The area of Lake Chuuzenji was located across the Iroha-zaka route.

The mountain of Nantaisan was on the north shore, and had an altitude of 2486m above sea level.

Legends had it that the first person to reach the summit was Great Monk Shoudou, the founder of Nikkou. During the second year of the Tenou period, i.e. the year 782 CE, Great Monk Shoudou failed his second consecutive attempt to reach the summit. On the third time, he resolved himself, declaring that "I will not enter enlightenment unless I reach the summit," and finally fulfilled his wish.

This place was actually a volcano. Due to the high concentration of iron, the soil and rocks in the area had a reddish brown color. The Nikkou mountain range was both a volcano and a treasure trove of minerals, as well as a famous volcanic zone in Japan.

For a war god of [Steel], volcanoes and minerals were like the hot water used to bathe and cleanse a newborn child.

"For the purpose of increasing my power, there is no better place than this..."

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong muttered to himself on the mountaintop.

The body and the voice belonged to Mariya Hikari, but the personality and divine power were that of the heretical monkey god's. He sat on a reddish brown rock, muttering to himself.

Embedded in a giant rock at this high altitude, was a rusted divine sword.

The portion of the sword sticking out of the rock was around 3m in length, and was reminiscent of the sword in the stone from the story of King Arthur.

"Lil' Bro, you're finally here. But you should have appeared a while ago, what took you this long? What happened?"

The Great Sage asked with incredulity.

His eyes focused their gaze upon the strange person walking up the mountain path before him.

The newcomer had pitch black skin, stiff spiky hair as bright red as a burning flame, sharply shaped eyes, a wide gaping mouth, a necklace of nine small skulls strung together hanging around his neck, and he was wearing a simple and modest monk's habit.

His name was Vaisravana[34], the deity whom Amakasu Touma last identified as the "General of the Deep Sands."

"Big Bro, apologies for my lateness."

In spite of his vicious appearance like an evil spirit's, Vaisravana spoke very calmly, though his voice carried a sense of melancholy, like a person who suffered so much torment that he wanted to commit suicide.

"I met Middle Bro along the way and came together with him."

"Oh? That guy also appeared."

"Yes. The two of us walked a long way, but just as we approached this place, Middle Bro suddenly said: 'Lil' Bro, it has been a long time since we returned to the mortal realm. It'd be nice to take a break here.' I told him 'Isn't that a bad idea?' But Middle Bro replied: 'Stupid! The precepts of Buddhism may emphasize the Three Treasures[35] of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, but the world

is much bigger than that. Booze, gambling, and women — boobs, butts, and lovely legs. In the mortal realm, these Three Treasures are waiting for us instead.' That was what he said."

Vaisravana recounted gloomily, but he took on a cheerful voice whenever he quoted the Middle Brother's lines. In contrast to his usual deathly gloomy demeanor, he apparently possessed a side highly talented in acting as well.

Hearing these words, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong whispered softly in amazement.

"Is that so? How ridiculous, his Three Treasures! So you guys are delayed for so long because you were seeking those frivolous Three Treasures?"

"Yes, Big Bro. That is why I left him half way and hurried over instead."

"Come on! Just like before, he is completely failing to consider the situation. Out with you, god of the mountain, transmit my voice to my silly little brother!"

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven performed a mudra with one hand and summoned a tree spirit. It was an extremely fragile divinity that could not take physical form in the mortal realm, and only possessed a spirit body with neither shape nor color, and no outstanding powers.

However, it was able to seek out targeted deities, and transmit voices across distances like the echoes of a Yama-biko.[36]

The results appeared a while after the instructions were given.

"—Big Bro, Big Bro! You're so mean!"

The third divine spirit finally arrived, flying on a black cloud.

Despite his chubby appearance and plump build, extraordinary muscles were hidden beneath the layer of fat. Furthermore, this person had a [Pig]'s face.

The face with a long snout was densely covered by short black fur.

He had round and shiny eyes, short and triangular ears that stood up stiffly, and two short but sharp tusks that protruded out on both sides of his snout.

"It's been so long since I last came to the mortal realm, and just as I happened to find a lively village, and was going to enjoy myself, Big Bro summons me over — that's so mean!"

The one who kept complaining was the black pig spirit, Zhu Ganglie.[37]

"Enough, you talk too much! You were never able to cease your obsession with the pleasures of the mundane world..."

"This is so wrong. Without good wine, good food, women and wealth, life in this world would be meaningless. Big Bro, you

really must change your monkey-like but totally unfun lifestyle. Let the smell of cosmetics hang all over you... By the way, Big Bro.. ."

"What is it, Middle Bro?"

"I just wanted to say that Big Bro's appearance is really cute this time... A face like white jade, it's so pretty. Kukuku, those lips are just like cherries. This tiny little body fascinates me oh so very much..."

Zhu Ganglie jumped down to the surface from the black cloud.

Standing on the reddish brown rock, he kept staring at Mariya Hikari's face nonstop. And so, the Great Sage kicked a little stone by his feet.

"Hah —"

The little stone flew into the air and smashed into Zhu Ganglie's forehead.

"Ouch! Big Bro, why are you so mean!"

"Nothing much, I just wanted to remind you that staring at this body with eyes of lust could be dangerous. Don't be too concerned. "

"I am very concerned!"

"By the way, Big Bro only possessed this little girl in order to release the binding spell of the [Keeper of the Horses]... But you don't look too well."

Vaisravana spoke in a gloomy tone, and the Great Sage nodded in agreement.

"Yes, the [Keeper of the Horses] took away my divine power and mettle of the Handsome Monkey King, turning me into a harmless monkey. I originally thought that I could dispel the binding spell by possessing this miko's body... But the fellow's power suffers from frequent interruptions."

"What do you mean by interruptions?"

"The reason why I can maintain the consciousness of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, is because of this Hime-Miko's disaster purification. But no matter what, this little girl is just a human. Using spirit techniques consumes stamina, making rest necessary and I cannot move freely whenever the miko's body is resting. It is already quite fortunate for me to be able to summon forth you two helpers."

If this challenge was not overcome soon enough, it would become a fatal weakness.

Thus the Great Sage chanted the dharani, and summoned two gods as allies.

These two were the junior disciples who shared the same master with Sun Wukong. Through the effects of the Great Sage's powerful spell, Zhu Wuneng[38] and Sha Wujing[39] — these two gods had heavenly origins and were summoned as [Heretic Gods] with the identities Zhu Ganglie and Vaisravana.

As a side note, their Buddhist names bearing the common character of "Wu"[40] were only bestowed after they were subdued and became the disciples of Monk Sanzang, hence the difference in names.

Zhu Ganglie and Vaisravana were their original names before being subdued.

"Lend me your divine powers, so that I can break through the [Keeper of the Horses]. Simply weakening the binding spell is not enough. I must utterly destroy the main culprit that prevents the recovery of my freedom."

"I see, that's right."

"Yes, acknowledged."

Hearing the orders of their Big Bro, Zhu Ganglie smiled proudly while Vaisravana nodded.

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven walked next to the divine sword embedded vertically in the rock.

"*Qian* is strength; *Kun*, of docility; *Zhen*, of stimulus to movement; *Xun*, of penetration; *Kan*, of what is precipitous and perilous; *Li*, of what is bright and what is catching; *Zhen*, of stoppage or arrest; and *Dui*, of pleasure and satisfaction."[41]

The Great Sage grabbed the blade of the divine sword with his hands and began to chant the spell words.

The divine sword, which resembled a rusted stick of iron, instantly disappeared and was absorbed by the Great Sage who had possessed the body of Hikari Mariya.

Using this opportunity, the spiritual and divine energies buried in Nantaisan were drawn out and concentrated into the monkey king warlord of steel.

"O Wisdom of steel originating from the Far West, and divine might of iron! Using the pedigree of this divine sword as the foundation, I, Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong enacts the spell to lift curses!"

Absorbing the immense divine powers of Nantaisan and the divine sword, the Great Sage bellowed loudly.

Flames appeared from behind his back. Like the intense burning fires at an iron forge, the pillars of flame gave off great heat.

"Namah samanta vajranam canda maharosana sphotaya hum trat ham mam namah samanta vajranam canda maharosana sphotaya hum trat ham."[42]

As the Great Sage recited the spell words, Zhu Ganglie and Vaisravana joined in as well.

"Namah samanta vajranam, namah samanta vajranam."

"Om vaisravanaye svaha. Om vaisravanaye svaha. Om vaisravanaye svaha."[43]

Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie, Sha Wujing — the three divine spirits chanted spell words with their hearts united as one.

They were chaotic divinities that originated from the Daoist realm but also became adherents of Buddhism. These are the complicated origins of the many different spell words they currently chanted.

The chanting continued for several hours, and the sun began to rise over the eastern horizon.

Paying respect to the rising sun, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven combined the volcano's spiritual energy with the divine might of the sword, with assistance from the divine power of his two juniors. Finally, he succeeded in the [Sword]'s forging, and the flaming divine sword manifested in his right hand majestically.

This was the Kulikaa Sword[44], the sword of wisdom that severs the Three Poisons of Ignorance, Attachment and Aversion.[45]

Superficially similar to Verethragna's [Sword] that Kusanagi Godou used, it was fundamentally different. The Kulikaa Sword currently embedded in the giant rock was a symbol of Acala and a divine sword that vanquished evil and lifted curses.

"Big Bro, you sure made something rare here."

"This is a sword of [Steel] that hails from foreign lands just like me. I borrowed it from the monk that has intimate ties with this piece of land."

The Great Sage answered Zhu Ganglie's query briefly. The worship of Acala[46] was brought to Japan from China by Grand Master Kuukai.[47] It is said that he was the one who came up with the name of Nikkou for this place, and also the one who left behind the Futarasan Stone Tablet in the biography of the pioneering Great Monk Shoudou.

"Exorcising sword of justice that vanquishes all disasters — infinitely incomparable to a human miko's disaster purification, sever the spell of the [Keeper of the Horses], and return to me my freedom!"

As the Great Sage raised Kulikaa Sword high towards the eastern sky, flames burst out from the blade and shot out.

The flames produced by the sword of wisdom were the weapons to lift the binding spell of the [Keeper of the Horses].

"But Big Bro, is this really OK?"

"Lil' Bro, what's the problem? I am just about to make a cool decisive pose, be quick with it."

Vaisravana spoke gloomily to the Great Sage who responded as he manipulated the flames.

"Very well, I will be frank. The great wizardry spell has been deeply rooted in these lands for the past three hundred years. Furthermore, it was put into place not only by ordinary mortals but also with participation from the gods and wizards living in the Netherworld. If you suddenly dispel it, wouldn't the results be rather unpredictable?"

"You love worrying too much, my Lil' Bro. How could something like that be possible —"

The words had scarcely left his mouth when the Great Sage — Mariya Hikari's adorable face became enshrouded by a layer of worry.

"In other words, such a possibility does exist?"

"Don't talk like it's for certain! We are gods, even if the sky falls down, we'll just prop it back up!"

"Ah, Big Bro, please take a look. There seems to be something over there."

Zhu Ganglie pointed to the east. The peaks of the Nikkou mountain range were shrouded by morning mist. Down below, Lake Chuuzenji and the streets of the humans were illuminated by the hues of dawn.

"Oh, he came here just to suppress me!"

From between the clouds of dawn, a spirit appeared in the form of a handsome youth and descended with splendor.

Wearing the traditional armor of ancient Chinese generals, he wielded a three-pronged spear. In addition to a pair of elegant and slender eyes, he also possessed a third [Eye] on his forehead.

The handsome three-eyed divine general was the visible manifestation of the [Keeper of the Horses] binding spell.

"Haha, how thoughtful of them to reproduce the divine appearance of the True Lord Erlang[48] to such a degree."

"Big Bro, please hold back for now. The two of us will protect you here."

Zhu Ganglie and Vaisravana did as they spoke and stood in front of the Great Sage.

In the past when the Great Sage came out to the surface world, he had always been taken back to Saitenguu by this spirit. Would the past be repeated again? This time he had the protection of his two sworn brothers.

Facing the [Keeper of the Horses] spirit brandishing the three-pronged spear, Zhu Ganglie wielded his Nine-Toothed Rake while Vaisravana attacked head on with a treasure staff that had a core of steel.

As his sworn brothers guarded him, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven vigorously waved the Kulikaa Sword and threw it towards the eastern sky with a sound like slicing wind.

Like a falling meteor, the flaming sword flew across the sky. Soon after, it fell and landed, embedding its blade into the surface of the ground, ripping apart the [Keeper of the Horses] wizardry cast on the lands of Nikkou. The manifested spirit immediately vanished without a trace.

With the disappearance of the three-eyed divine general, the Great Sage immediately yelled:

"Excellent, the interloper has vanished! From now on, we three brothers will work together and build our kingdom of paradise on this vast land! First, let's gather my people and bestow upon them the blessing of immortality just like what I did in the past at the Water Curtain Cave in the Mountain of Fruit and Flowers!"

"Hmm, I want boobs, butts and thighs. A place without women cannot be called a kingdom of paradise!"

"Ah... I don't really have any particular desires, but I will give my all to assist you."

With the collapse of the great wizardry spell, the imposing presence of the three divine spirits greatly increased.

"By the way, Big Bro, now that the [Keeper of the Horses]'s cursed bonds have been broken, you don't have to stay in that miko any more, right? Are you going to leave her body?"

"That's right, I should recover my original form — Hmm, why can't I change back?"

Hearing the Little Brother's suggestion, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven shook his body.

However, there was no effect and the Great Sage was unable to leave Mariya Hikari's body.

"Looks like you've accustomed yourself to this miko's body more than expected."

"Well, I guess there's no real problem to stay like this for now."

The sworn younger brothers commented casually. Like the Great Sage, they were all very spontaneous in character and lacking in long term planning.

"Yes, in time it'd probably peel off like a scab."

As the Great Sage replied frivolously, an unexpected change occurred.

Vaisravana and Zhu Ganglie's movements suddenly stopped and the two of them petrified and turned into stone. Faced with two stone statues of divine spirits, the Great Sage became a bit displeased.

"The manifestation spell lost effect? Looks like not everything can go smoothly after all."

No matter, when necessary he will simply cast the spell again.

Shrugging his shoulders, the Great Sage chanted a mantra and shrunk the stone statues of his brothers to the size of little fingers and placed them in his pocket.

"Great, the preparations are now complete. Now for some fun!"

From the mountain top of Nantaisan, the view overlooking the lands below was superb, just as recorded on Kuukai's Futarasan Stone Tablet.

'Looking down there was a great lake. Not very wide in the east-west direction / But stretching far along north-south. Silver snow covered the land / Golden flowers bloomed in the trees. The lake surface was a generous mirror / Reflecting all scenery and colors. The mountain and the lakes complemented each other / The view was breath-taking.'

The great lake mentioned was Lake Chuuzenji, but since winter had yet to arrive, the silver-white snow covering the scenery was not present.

As the Great Sage used Hikari's eyes to survey the majestic scenery, he released divine power, spreading the dominating power of transformation from the surroundings of Nantaisan.

On the nearby volcanic rocks, monkeys were continuously being created.

Like the divine messengers released in the Netherworld stable yesterday, these monkeys' bodies were covered with golden fur that approached a shade of reddish brown with a metallic luster.

The number of these sacred monkeys born from rocks reached several hundred.

"My underlings, come here and serve Old Sun well! Gather your talents and offer them to me! Look up high and witness the Great Sage's might which once threatened the heavenly armies!"

With one order from the Great Sage, the little monkeys squeezed close together and began colliding with one another. Their bodies merged into giant bodies that grew larger and larger.

When a hundred small monkeys came together, they became a single giant monkey about ten-odd meters in height.

The appearance was the same as the giant ape divine beasts that descended at the Nikkou Toushouguu.

A total of six giant monkeys were born, with arms longer than legs, and their bodies built like gorillas.

"Yes, go forth! If any enemies try to invade my territory, you guys will be the vanguard for intercepting them!"

The six giant monkeys descended down the mountain with great speed and agility in spite of their massive bodies.

Having completed this, the Great Sage casually lied down on the ground. He was tired out from the various tasks and now needed to rest and recover his energy.

...While all this was unfolding, trivial things were happening behind the Great Sage's back without him noticing.

A certain youth had hidden himself in the middle of the mountain a couple hundred meters from the top, and had been observing the events at the peak.

As a rare martial arts genius, he saw everything clearly despite the great distance.

Unnoticed from beginning to end, he quietly began to descend from the mountain.

Of course, this youth was Lu Yinghua.

Part 4

That night, Kusanagi Godou had difficulty sleeping.

He needed adequate rest in order to prepare for battle, but how did it end up like this? The reason was the scene that happened just before bed time.

After deciding everyone's rooms in the cabin, Erica followed Godou into the same room.

"H-How much longer are you going to follow me for? I'm about to go to bed!"

"It's been so long since the last time we shared the night under one roof. Of course I have to make the most of this opportunity. Don't you think it'd be nice for us to share a bed tonight?"

Erica responded to Godou's questioning with a pure and innocent smile. Just as Godou was about to drive her out of his room, even Liliana and Yuri entered. After understanding the situation, the silver-haired knight made the following suggestion.

"Erica sure is a pain, Kusanagi Godou. I suspect such a noisy presence will prevent you from resting properly. Thus I too, shall sleep in this room, and guard you while you rest!"

"E-Everyone please be mindful of the situation! For young men and women to sleep in the same room, how improper!"

Yuri yelled with her face all red.

Godou was about to agree with her completely, but Yuri's next words silenced him.

"I shall sleep here too, in order to prevent you all from doing anything indecent!"

Thus the beautiful Hime-Miko also made her declaration. In this room which only had a single bed, three sets of futons were brought over.

"Mariya, how could you say something like that too?"

"I-It cannot be helped... If you all stay in the same room, who knows what could happen, s-so I must come along."

Godou questioned the girl who was supposed to be the most normal, but ended up getting such an answer.

Thus the sleepless night began. With four people packed in this tiny room, it would not be exaggerating to use the term ' overpopulated.' Although Godou was the only person lying on the only bed, he was unable to close his eyes.

No matter how hard he tried, he could not stop noticing the other three people in the room.

Before sleeping, the three of them had changed in their own respective rooms. Liliana and Yuri were wearing common pajamas which looked like they were brought from home, but it was still a look that Godou never had a chance to witness under normal conditions. On the other hand, Godou found it incredible that he found himself unable to look at them straight despite the simple thin fabric without fancy decoration. Besides, there was the problem of Erica.

As usual, she went to sleep under the covers in just her underwear.

A Campione's vision allowed him to see clearly even in the dark . With just a simple glance, he could see portions of Erica's bare skin as white as snow where they stuck out from under the blanket , as well as her blonde hair that had been messed up by sleep. Godou frantically pulled up his cotton blanket and tried his hardest to close his eyes and sleep.

The breathing noises of the girls and their occasional dream talk troubled Godou immensely.

Despite his excited state of mind, Godou's exhausted body still needed sleep. As his consciousness began to fade, he was able to doze lightly for about two or three hours worth of sleep.

When he regained his senses again, it was early in the morning, and the rosy rays of dawn came in from the window.

"—W-What is going on? My body..."

On the bed, Godou was greatly taken aback.

His entire body ached exceptionally, and all major and minor joints throbbed with pain. There was also a sense of nausea. It was the first time he ever felt pain like this.

"Perhaps... it's the injuries from the beating yesterday!?"

Come to think of it, every time his body was struck by Luo Hao, he felt like his body was accumulating serious internal injuries. Now it was evident it was not simply his imagination. Once again, Godou was reminded of Luo Hao's terrifying existence.

"Mariya... Where did she go?"

Preparing to go back to sleep, Godou discovered that Yuri was no longer in the room.

Erica and Liliana were sound asleep but only the Hime-Miko was absent. Her pajamas were neatly folded and placed on the blanket she had been using.

If she had gone for an early morning walk, the current time would be a little too early...

Deciding it was a bit strange, Godou quietly slipped out of the room.

Leaving the wooden cabin, he took a deep breath of the fresh morning air. With the rising sun revealing itself from the backbone of the mountain range, it was an excellent view of dawn.

However, this meant that the battle against the Great Sage was drawing ever closer.

In spite of that, Kusanagi Godou was still full of hesitation.

"In the end I still can't be decisive... What a failure of a king."

As he muttered to himself, Godou felt a person's presence.

The Hime-Miko dressed in white garments and a red hakama was approaching him.

"You have woken up — King."

"Where did you go? Mariya..."

Godou was in the middle of his question when he noticed something wasn't quite right with Yuri.

There was a lost expression on her face, and her eyes were out of focus, furthermore, her eyes were now — the color of glass!

"Let me offer an answer to the King's worries. The sword of wisdom in your arm can be of use in this battle. Its power not only slays gods but also severs a god's spiritual might, which is why it is called the sword of exorcism. Even the monkey king's spell that imprisons the young little miko can be severed."

Yuri's glass-colored pupils wavered in a bizarre manner.

In the past battle against Marquis Voban, Yuri also received divine guidance through spirit vision.

However, her current eye color was exactly the same as the glass princess in the Netherworld. Come to think of it, she also mentioned once that the Hime-Miko were distant descendants with the same bloodline as hers.

"Please do not forget, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven's martial prowess is beyond equal. Whether your sharp blade can strike the Great Sage or not, is up to your courage and determination. It will be a dire and desperate battle. Oh my? Did I just say something?"

Yuri's eyes returned to normal with their usual black pupils. She was back.

"You just told me... an answer to a question that had been troubling me."

Godou exclaimed as he answered.

Compared to Erica and Liliana, Yuri was not a very conspicuous person but she held amazing powers.

She was often able to give clear directions during times when they were stuck, and sometimes it even led to strategies that solved the root of problems.

"Really? If that is the case, then getting up early to meditate was not wasted for me."

"Eh? Why did you do such a thing?"

"Since yesterday, I have noticed Godou-san worrying over many things... I was wondering if I could give you some advice, so I came out here to clear my thoughts, and was hoping it would be great if I could receive divine guidance."

Smiling gently beneath the rosy clouds of dawn, there was nothing more beautiful than Yuri at this time.

Spirit vision was a spell that only had a tiny chance of obtaining divine inspiration. To hope for divine guidance to descend actively in response was very wishful thinking. That was what Yuri explained in the past, so it was quite unbelievable to see her being so proactive now.

Godou felt very grateful to her, and he became strongly determined. This girl's younger sister, Hikari who has grown closer to him as well, will definitely be saved by his hand!

As Godou endured the impulse rising from deep within him, Yuri suddenly whispered softly.

"Actually I had been worrying since last night, whether I should mention this matter to Godou-san?"

"What is this matter?"

"Yes, even though Hikari is an apprentice, she is also one of Musashino's Hime-Miko just like me. When a [Heretic God] brings disaster to the world, we must protect the people from being harmed by the gods, and put our lives on the line. Therefore, if Hikari was completely possessed, I must give up the notion of saving her."

Sorrowfully averting her gaze, Yuri continued softly:

"In truth, I know very well that I should not say such things — but still, no matter what, I hope Godou-san can listen to my opinion..."

Yuri was not being very forthcoming and meandered without getting into the main topic.

But her current attitude made her intentions even clearer. For Yuri who was serious, honest and intelligent, she was hesitating because she knew very well how irresponsible her request was.

It's enough, I already understand. Godou wanted to make this girl more relaxed.

"Mariya... I will definitely save Hikari. No matter what Sayanomiya Kaoru and the members of the Committee say, my top priority is to take back Mariya Hikari from that monkey bastard. This is already decided. I will worry about the involvement of Nikkou City and the local residents some other time."

Somehow, Godou felt a burden lifted from his heart once he openly declared his decision.

Perhaps he was making an important conclusion right now. That was what he suspected.

"G-Godou-san... Thank you... I..."

Yuri lowered her head as tears streamed down.

I beg you, and hope you can save my younger sister. This was the expression of her gratitude to Godou for accepting her request conveyed without words.

"You don't have to thank me, you know. I haven't even fought the Great Sage yet. Perhaps when pressured by him and backed into a corner, I might forget everything I just said, and defeat the monkey along with Hikari, eh?"

"No you will not. Godou-san will definitely not do something like that. I know very well."

Yuri spoke quietly but firmly.

Those were the words full of confidence, spoken by the Hime-Miko whose spirit vision saw through everything.

"Is it because of spirit vision?"

"Possibly. I am not too certain of the reason myself, but I know Godou-san definitely will not abandon Hikari — a girl who has gotten close to you. Even if this is the result of spirit vision, I would say it only contributes half to my certainty."

Half? Godou felt intrigued by this strange indirect way of describing things. What did she actually mean?

"The other half is my trust in Godou-san. Not as a Hime-Miko but as Mariya Yuri begging you to save my sister."

Bowing her head with propriety to make her request, Yuri spoke resolutely.

"Since this is a rare opportunity, let me clarify at this time. No matter how the current incident comes to an end, I will follow you for a lifetime, until your path as a Campione reaches its conclusion , or the end of my life —"

"Y-You mean until one of us dies?"

This exaggerated description shocked Godou as the beautiful Hime-Miko quietly nodded her head.

"Yes, just like the way your life has been till now, the prospects of a peaceful life will be slim. No matter what the final ending is, I hope that you will allow me to stay by your side until the very end . Will you agree to this request of mine?"

It was quite a sudden and unexpected request. As Godou watched in shock, Yuri showed a faint smile as beautiful as a budding cherry blossom.

"You do not have to answer immediately, because I shall wait for you forever..."

Bowing elegantly, she returned to the wooden cabin.

It was three days ago when Annie Charlton finally received news that Asherah was alive.

Her elderly friend and collaborator, Joe West passed along the news as "a certain noble person providing important information."

She wasn't sure where the news came from, but since her mortal enemy the witch was still alive, plus the additional fact that the most vicious Campione had been summoned from China and was planning something in Japan, Annie decided to book a flight immediately. Getting things done quickly and decisively was one of her qualities.

She arrived at Narita airport around evening yesterday. Her destination was apparently a famous tourist attraction full of exotic allure.

Afterwards, Annie called a taxi and headed to Tokyo. Her original plan was to spend the night at a hotel for a good night's rest to relieve her body from the exhaustion of the long flight, then head over to the scene in question.

However, once she received the emergency news from Professor West through her cellphone, she immediately changed her plans.

A certain noble person (most likely the former spokesperson of the Witenagemot)[49] had sent a series of reports. A [Heretic God] had been sighted in the little city of Nikkou. Hence, Annie revised her plan to rest at a hotel, and decided to drive instead and rush to the scene, struggling with the unfamiliar roads and adjusting to the steering wheel on the right.

Even though she was tired and jet lagged, there was no time to take things easy any more.

Annie Charlton was a woman with a great sense of justice and responsibility. After driving a good many hours on the streets throughout the night, it was morning the next day when she arrived at the scene.

"I remember there is an organization in Japan equivalent to the SSI[50]. It would be best to get into contact with them to gather more intelligence. However —"

Annie spoke to herself as she drove.

A few years ago, she had the chance to visit Japan and managed to gain some understanding of the country. She needed to get hold of the details of the current situation as quickly as possible so that she can defeat the culprit.

Come to think of it, a Campione had also been born in Japan recently.

Should she leave things for him to handle? But typical Campiones take days or even weeks to arrive on scene to battle a [Heretic God]. If she could resolve the incident before that happens, there should not be too much trouble.

"It would be best if this guy wakes up soon, for he seems like he can provide a lot of information."

Through the rear-view mirror, Annie glanced at the condition of the young man lying on the back seat.

Not too long ago, she had discovered someone unconscious near the river of Daiyagawa. After examining the items carried on his body, she confirmed that many of them were related to wizardry.

He could very well be a member of Japan's SSI (which seemed to be called something like the History Compilation Committee).

Annie Charlton did not know at the time, but this youth was Amakasu Touma and also the missing member of the History Compilation Committee.

Chapter 3 - Kusanagi Godou Enters the Monkey King's Territory

Part 1

Every year in October, the surroundings of Lake Chuuzenji became encircled by the red-shaded mountains.

Concentrated on the lake front were eateries, shops selling souvenirs and other things, as well as many facilities such as hotels and travel agencies. This was the hot springs resort area called Chuuzenji Hot Springs.

These lands were now undergoing a cataclysmic change. Monkeys were appearing, and not just one or two.

The pedestrian walkways, souvenir shops and restaurants catering to tourists were filled with monkeys; big and small monkeys casually strolled about as a family; there was also a monkey that apparently stole something and was being chased by a group of monkeys wielding clubs. Monkeys were everywhere.

"They were all originally humans after all... Were they transformed into monkeys by the Great Sage's power?"

Seishuuin Ena looked down upon the monkey kingdom and murmured to herself.

She had infiltrated the forest near Lake Chuuzenji, and was now observing the situation from a position high up in the branches.

Traveling without using any sort of transportation like a car, Ena traversed mountains and forests with her monkey-like agility and physical abilities. Thirty minutes ago, she had just passed the Iroha-saku Route when she suddenly got chased by violent giant monkeys that seemed to be divine beasts.

Through her martial arts and natural instincts, she was able to fight her way out and lose them.

"Looks like I'd better report to Kaoru first."

This sort of sensible idea was a rare moment for Ena. She took out her cellphone.

Oops, no batteries. Shrugging her shoulders, Ena put the phone away.

"Well, since it's them anyway, they wouldn't expect me to report regularly in the first place. Putting that aside, Ena should find out more about the situation here before His Majesty's group arrives."

Slung over her shoulder was a long slender bag made of cloth, carrying a two-foot-three-inch Japanese tachi blade.[51]

Compared to her beloved Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, it was much shorter. But as a normal weapon, this size was more appropriate. In many different ways, the divine blade was a cheating existence.

Ena felt herself getting naturally excited as she looked forward to seeing that youth very soon, the one who had taken away her former partner.

On the morning after the whole incident began, Sayanomiya Kaoru drove her car towards the camping grounds where Godou and his group were temporarily staying. After one or two hours she reached the petrified Nikkou Toushouguu. Under the bright sunlight overlooking the strange sight, the areas surrounding Toushouguu, Rinnouji and Futarasan Shrine were all under high alert.

Sealing off the area using crime scene tape, policemen dressed in smart-looking uniforms stood on guard, preventing any unauthorized entry.

"Detailed reports are still being prepared, but due to various reasons, Toushouguu and other places are undergoing emergency repairs... We had the area sealed first using this pretext."

The one explaining was Sayanomiya Kaoru who was there to welcome Godou's group.

"The Great Sage Equaling Heaven seems to have transformed all the tourists and local residents here into monkeys yesterday. Checking out the nearby shops in the area, there was not a single soul in sight. However, just the fact that people vanished en masse instead of being massacred could be considered rather fortunate amidst this crisis."

As Sayanomiya Kaoru led the way, Godou walked beside her. Following behind them were Yuri, Erica and Liliana.

Following the western visiting path from Futarasan Shrine, rows of souvenir shops could be seen. They were also sealed by police, and the feeling was unusually quiet.

"By the way, I didn't think the Committee had the power to even mobilize police forces..."

Godou felt somewhat uncomfortable.

There was a group wearing imposing-looking uniforms, as well as others who looked suspicious despite wearing suits, all running about very busily.

"Of course. Dating back to the Meiji period, the History Compilation Committee has maintained intimate ties with the Japanese Self-Defense Force and the police, as well as various bureaucracies such as the current Association of Shinto Shrines, the MEXT[52], the MLIT[53] and the Ministry of the Environment. Speaking of stories dating back to the honeymoon period of our predecessors, the Manchurian railway and the Imperial Japanese Army, one could probably write a great historical treatise. It certainly would be a very interesting research project."

Kaoru cheerfully conversed about these topics of interest.

"Amakasu-san also counts as a civil servant, but he operates under an official identity as someone who does phony shrine duties at various shrines, a person with all sorts of suspicious past experiences."

"—By the way, Kaoru-san, has there been any news of Amakasu-san?"

Hearing the familiar name, Yuri entered the conversation.

Godou also waited for Kaoru's answer. From the news last night, Amakasu was currently missing.

"Sorry, Yuri, we haven't mentioned it to you all yet, but he was already saved by someone this morning. It's a very interesting development, I'll explain to you all later."

For some reason, Kaoru made a wry smile faintly.

For the purpose of a private discussion, Godou separated from Erica and the others, and with Kaoru, the two of them walked towards Futarasan Shrine.

It was a world entirely turned into stone.

Whether the wooden buildings, the lush cedar forest, the soil, the springs, everything had transformed completely into stone.

"Amakasu-san's report mentioned, that Cult Leader Luo Hao was apparently sealed within these rocks... So she was buried alive ? Who knows if she will be fine."

Kaoru lightly kicked the solid rock surface of the ground with the tip of her foot as she murmured quietly.

"Hahahahaha! Being buried alive for merely half a day, how could that possibly kill Master! For someone like her, this kind of method would take three years to work!"

The one laughing out loud was Lu Yinghua who jumped down from a petrified cedar tree.

Holding his left fist in his right hand, he bowed his head and saluted to Godou using the martial arts way.

"Lu Yinghua apologizes for his lateness. Kusanagi Godou-sama, the revered king worshiped by the masses, may your longevity rival the heavens, and your might bring peace and order to this world!"

Godou felt shocked and flattered by his fluent and elegant greeting.

"Lu-kun... Please use a more normal choice of words."

"Sorry, due to Master's teaching, I have a habit of greeting all Campiones in a solemn manner. If I ever displease that person, I risk ending up on the verge of death."

Revealing the painful memories of his everyday life, Lu Yinghua continued:

"Then I will obediently speak without reservation. By the way, Kusanagi-sama, please call me directly by name. Or if you prefer, do as Master and use a nickname. I don't mind."

"OK, then I'll call you Yinghua."

Perhaps because Lu Yinghua was male and younger than him, Godou found it easy to accept his suggestion.

Once again, Godou was reminded of the fact that getting along with men was much easier.

"Sayanomiya-san, this is Cult Leader Luo Hao's disciple."

"I know, you're the famed young hero Lu. Though this is our first meeting, you are quite famous in our circles. I believe people on your side have also heard of me."

As introductions were made, Kaoru signaled with her eyes.

"Kusanagi-san and I... were planning on having a conference of leaders between the two of us. However... I can allow Mr. Lu to join in as the Chinese representative. Let me first explain the situation. The Great Sage is currently moving from Nikkou City Street to Okunikkou."

Kaoru took out a map of Nikkou from her shirt pocket.

"This area from Lake Chuuzenji to Okuyumoto is called Okunikkou. Currently, any ordinary person who steps into this territory will immediately transform into a monkey."

The beautiful Committee leader traced her finger along the map as she explained to the other two.

"The routes going into Okunikkou by car are the First and Second Iroha-saku Routes, the Konsei Mountain Pass on the border of Gunma Prefecture, as well as the Nishizawa side. I have already sealed off the region with mobile teams."

"When we go there, will they let us pass?"

"Of course, but no matter which route you pick, please be careful of the giant apes our spies have encountered... Come to think of it, Mr. Lu, you should have been chased all night by a divine beast yesterday, right?"

"Actually that big monkey gave up on pursuing me after a while, so I followed it instead."

Lu Yinghua smiled with satisfaction.

His outstanding qinggong[54] and superhuman mobility allowed him to perform tracking missions of this sort.

"Despite their immense size, they move quite nimbly, giving me a bit of a hard time last night. But thanks to penetrating deep into enemy territory, I was able to witness something extraordinary on my way back. This morning around daybreak, there were some unusual presences gathering on the sacred mountain on Okunikkou, so I investigated a little."

Lu Yinghua recounted everything he witnessed on Nantaisan.

Godou learned that new enemies had appeared, and his formidable foe had removed the binding spell.

"Even Zhu Bajie and Sha Wujing have appeared... Looks like the situation has become rather troublesome."

"Yinghua, how is Hikari — the girl whose body was taken by the Great Sage, what is her condition like?"

As Kaoru commented with a worried expression, Godou took the opportunity to inquire about Hikari.

Since the binding spell was removed, Hikari's disaster purification shouldn't be needed any more.

"What's strange is the Great Sage went to sleep using her body... But from what I overheard from a distance, it sounded like he wasn't able to leave the body of the miko."

Hearing Lu Yinghua's report, Godou felt relieved.

Since little had changed in Hikari's condition, the worst case scenario had not happened.

"Kusanagi-san... Hikari's role as a hostage has not changed. When fighting the Great Sage, I fear that child may become a hindrance—"

"Sayanomiya-san, please do not waste any more words on this matter."

Godou quickly interrupted her. He had already been warned by Erica once last night and there was no need for him to hear it again .

"I will surely bring Hikari back from that monkey. I will definitely save her. All other matters, like defeating the [Heretic God] or saving the poor distraught people will be considered afterwards. There is no need to explain to me what you are trying to say."

"I see... So this is your decision?"

For some reason, Kaoru sounded greatly interested.

Her manner of speaking usually carried subtle tones, and seldom revealed her interest so openly without pretense.

"Only I can defeat these gods who bring trouble to people, so asking me to fight is fine. I don't mind that. However, my power is my own. I will not allow anyone to use me for their own purposes. I will neither use my power in areas I hate, nor will I entertain any complaints about my preferences."

Though Godou knew he was making a very unreasonable declaration, he finished his statement in one breath. He understood that saving the world required being impartial to private concerns, but at this time all he wanted to do was follow the answer in his mind.

"If someone thinks that abandoning a girl could save even more people, then let that person go fight a god alone. It doesn't concern

me. However, if I am the one who is fighting, then things have to be done my way. Anyway, what I'm trying to say is, if you are going to rely on someone, then just shut up with the nagging!"

"Well said, Kusanagi-sama, you are now acting as befitting your stature as a devil king."

Praised by the demonic cult leader's direct disciple, Godou felt a little embarrassed.

His current proposal was identical to all the other Campiones who always did as they wished, and no different from the philosophies of Cult Leader Luo Hao and Marquis Voban.

"You're really hopeless, but actually no matter what Kusanagi-san decided, I was prepared to take full responsibility... Though things seem to have taken a most interesting turn. Anyway, I never expected you to say something like 'It is fine to sacrifice Hikari. I will defeat the Great Sage Equaling Heaven!' That would have been quite off-putting."

How could I possibly say something like that! Even Kaoru smiled.

"Despite how I may appear to others, I really like people who like to act cool or follow their whimsical ideals. By the way, I like cute girls too, but as the leader of an organization, there are times when my hand is forced. However... this time it's the orders of His Majesty the Devil King, so I have no choice but to obey."

The Committee Branch Chief smiled mischievously.

The way she and Lu Yinghua were supporting my decision, made them look like unscrupulous businessmen conspiring with corrupt officials, or rather, should they be described as followers of the devil king and enemies of the world?

As a Campione, looks like I am advancing in a most questionable direction...

While Godou lowered his head in thought, Kaoru took out her cellphone. Apparently someone was calling.

"Kusanagi-san, the missing fellow will be arriving soon. Do you want to meet him? There's also a very interesting visitor coming with him."

After conversing for a while, Kaoru hung up the phone and asked Godou.

The missing fellow was probably Amakasu, but who was the interesting visitor? Godou tried to guess as he followed after Kaoru.

In a most matter-of-fact manner, Lu Yinghua went along with them. The three of them came to the main visiting road before Toushouguu.

Erica, Liliana and Yuri, the three of them were chatting with the suit-wearing youth. As expected, he was Amakasu of course.

"Kusanagi-san, how embarrassing... But I finally got back."

Noticing Godou's arrival, Amakasu hurried to greet him.

His voice sounded drained of energy. Looking closely, his face seemed a bit sick, and his suit was filthier than usual.

It was the first time for Godou to see him in such a weakened state.

At this time, Godou noticed the Caucasian lady standing behind him. Her short hair was a brilliant shade of red like a burning fire. Her elegant face was highly intellectual and extremely strong-willed, and she was wearing a leather jacket with leather pants.

A completely flawless, cool and ethereal beauty. Such was the initial impression that this woman gave.

"T-This is Miss Annie Charlton. S-She is the one who fortuitously saved me when I was unconscious and completely drenched. I-I owe my life to her, my savior."

Amakasu's body trembled incessantly, and he kept wiping his nose as he introduced the one who brought him here.

The ethereal beauty greeted with impeccable Japanese.

"My name is Annie, pleased to meet you."

Part 2

Amakasu Touma and Annie Charlton.

The people standing around these two were Kusanagi Godou and Mariya Yuri, Erica Blandelli, Liliana Kranjcar, as well as Sayanomiya Kaoru and Lu Yinghua.

A most unexpected gathering of influential people.

Amakasu continued to shiver as he recounted the circumstances of Vaisravana's appearance.

"Are you still hurt from that time? You don't look too well."

"N-No, that's not it, my injuries have already been healed by magic. However, I've caught a severe flu from lying wet and unconscious for a good many hours, and I currently have a high fever."

In other words, healing magic's effects against disease was much less effective than for physical injuries.

Godou recalled the magic trivia he once heard from Erica.

"If I didn't receive Miss Annie's aid, p-perhaps I would have gotten pneumonia. Miss Annie seems to be from Los Angeles, a-and a mage from over there."

"Let me be direct. I came to Japan to track down the divine ancestor Asherah."

Annie followed up Amakasu's explanation with a clear voice that matched her ice cold demeanor closely.

"Could you be... a benevolent mage?"

"That is correct, I have never joined the sorcerers' faction."

The red-haired ethereal beauty nodded at Erica's question.

Benevolent mage. Godou felt intrigued by this term he had never heard before.

"Due to many historical reasons, there are not too many magi present in North America. As for the villains who gathered there

after being driven out by the righteous magic associations in Europe, they are called 'sorcerers.' All magi who oppose them are labeled 'benevolent' in distinction."

Liliana contributed her explanation.

"I have heard that Asherah was being used by the Chinese Campione and has become Leviathan once again. I also know about the Great Sage Equaling Heaven manifesting by possessing a young girl's body, and that you are the team formed to resolve this incident."

Annie swept her gaze across everyone present and declared:

"Since secrecy is not essential for this incident, let me begin by revealing my mission. I was sent here by Los Angeles' king to confirm Asherah's death. My mission ends once the witch is dead. However, I think it would be rude to leave without greeting everyone here at the site of this cataclysmic event, so let me assist you all."

"Los Angeles' king? Then you must be...?"

"John Pluto Smith's subordinate?"

Yuri and Liliana were greatly surprised, but Annie quietly corrected them.

"Please do not call me his subordinate, but refer to me as his collaborator instead. Though he does lord over Los Angeles like a king, the thought of building his own kingdom has never been his

plan. That is the personal style of John Pluto Smith, please remember that."

"This is exactly why I was so intent on introducing her to Kusanagi-san. Perhaps this is an excellent opportunity to sign a friendship treaty between Japan and America."

As Kaoru mischievously made her request, Godou gave her a quick glance.

"One must possess substantial magical power in order to pass through Okunikkou without being transformed into a monkey. I have already confirmed with her guarantors — the Three Sages of North America, that Annie Charlton is completely above suspicion and has no problems in ability either."

Kaoru turned towards Annie to introduce Godou.

"Miss Charlton, this is the leader of our crisis team, Kusanagi Godou-san."

The History Compilation Committee core member did not reveal Godou was the Campione of Japan. This was clearly a deliberate move to give Kusanagi Godou the choice to disclose his identity or not.

In this current situation where there was a severe shortage of manpower, Annie's suggestion was most gratifying.

However, if things had worsened so much over a single night, was it really appropriate to get her involved?

"Anyway... Before we decide whether we accept Miss Annie or not, let me report the latest findings."

Sayanomiya Kaoru provided news from the scouting personnel at the scene. Then Lu Yinghua summarized his eyewitness account of the three deities gathering on the peak of Nantaisan, as well as the disappearance of the [Keeper of the Horses] enchantment.

Finally, Godou mentioned the latest developments. After hearing all the current information at hand, Erica nodded intently while Liliana shook her head in distress. Realizing the situation made it even harder to rescue her younger sister, Yuri had a frozen expression. As for Amakasu, his already sickly demeanor became slightly worse.

On the other hand, Annie Charlton—

"Is that so? The situation truly is severe. In that case, we must hurry to the scene and try our hardest to resolve the incident. Godoh, do you agree?"

Speaking without changing her expression, Annie's calm tone of voice made clear her sincerity and strength of will.

Could he trust this person? This woman was the collaborator of the North American Campione, and she seemed to give off a kind of incredible presence. Godou nodded to her in agreement.

One hour later.

Godou and the rest were riding a police car summoned by the History Compilation Committee, and had arrived at the entrance to Iroha-saku Route.

Never expecting himself to be sitting in this sort of black and white public vehicle in such a manner—

Godou had rather mixed feelings.

Just as Kaoru had mentioned, Iroha-saku Route was being sealed by a mobile team of policemen and their vehicles. They did not obstruct Godou's group who called themselves members of the History Compilation Committee. At this point, they switched to a smooth-running silver SUV specially prepared by the Committee.

Annie Charlton was in the driver's seat while Godou sat beside her with Erica, Liliana and Yuri in the back.

The ones who stayed behind in Nikkou City Street were Lu Yinghua, Amakasu because of his flu, and Kaoru as the highest decision maker of the Committee here. The other two aside, Godou really wished that the martial artist from Hong Kong could accompany him as a major combatant—

"I have something complicated to handle, so I must stay here."

"I see... But if you could come along, it'd be a great help."

Godou was greatly disappointed by the rejection. In a group with his usual team mates plus Annie, he really wanted another male companion.

"My most sincere apologies, but since Master is buried alive at this place, I have to show effort in trying to rescue her or else there will be all sorts of horrifying consequences."

"Yinghua, I never knew you missed your master so much, are you worrying about Luo Hao?"

Just as Godou thought he had discovered a caring and thoughtful side to him, Lu Yinghua shook his head.

"Nope, I am completely not worried about her. If it's Master, it is definitely possible for her to smash the stone prison and escape with her own power. However as her disciple, if I don't make it evident I spent three days carrying out rescue operations, she may throw a fit going 'You should be treating Master like family, what a cold and merciless child you are!' Thus, before I secure proof of presence at the scene, I can't come over."

To be able to make this dauntless youth so wary...

Godou silently mourned for him, imagining the kind of trauma he had received from Luo Hao.

"—As feared, the [Eyes] I sent out have all been repelled, just as Sayanomiya Kaoru mentioned. Unless we cross this mountain pass , magical investigation cannot be used."

Just as the car was about to start, Liliana explained as she sat in the back seat with her eyes closed.

"What do you mean by eyes?"

"Lily has the ability to use the [Witch's Eye], didn't she use it yesterday?"

Erica explained. The vision-augmenting witchcraft technique of the [Witch's Eye] was said to create a third eye out of the void, and could be used to perform reconnaissance from afar.

"I heard the Committee members who could use investigative spells mention that they were unable to send [Eyes] to Okunikkou. Just as seen from spirit vision earlier, the Great Sage's divine power has saturated the air in this vicinity. This divine power likely produces effects similar to a barrier."

Yuri reported the results of spirit vision.

"Godoh, you must be an amazing person despite your young age. For your team to consist of the [Diavolo Rosso] of the Copper Black Cross, the witch of the Bronze Black Cross, as well as a Japanese spirit vision specialist... What are your own talents?"

"Umm... Regarding this, let me explain a little later."

Godou tried to dodge the question from the impressed Annie. It was very likely he would need to reveal the truth soon, but there was no hurry. At this time, the car started to move.

Iroha-saku Route was a winding road that twisted and turned just like the characters used to write its name.

The mountain path sloped greatly and there were a series of sharp turns. This was a scenic route that went up and down the

mountain of Nantaisan and provided a great view of the natural mountain scenery.

Annie drove the car with great seriousness and caution, safely crossing the first difficult section.

Soon after, they could see the mountain forest dyed in the autumn colors of red and yellow. During this time, the car finally reached an easily congested portion of the mountain road. After about ten or so turns, they arrived at a sharply winding U-turn. In that very instant, a giant monkey pushed apart the trees and appeared before the car!

"It's the divine beast from yesterday!"

The moment Erica shouted, Annie had already taken action. Slamming on the brakes, she opened the car window on the driver's side, and extended her arm, a slender revolver in her hand .

BANG! Annie fired her gun without any hesitation.

As silver sparks scattered, the bullet struck the giant ape's fur, tracing out a silver trajectory. It probably carried some kind of magical effect.

However, the giant ape seemed to be completely unaffected, and reached out with its long and thick arms.

"Annie Charlton, that level of magical attack will not affect a divine beast!"

Liliana warned.

Godou noticed another silhouette being reflected in the rear-view mirror, but Yuri had already cried out before he could give a warning.

"F-From behind as well, everyone be careful!"

A giant ape had also appeared from behind, and they were now stuck in an attack from both sides. Encountering two divine beasts on a mountain road like this would normally be a hopeless situation.

In spite of all this, Annie remained completely calm, and her eyes, full of fighting spirit, glared at the two divine beasts, as befitting the collaborator chosen by the American Campione.

At this time, Godou became aware of a certain feeling and signaled to the girls in the back seat with his eyes.

The first to react was Erica who gestured to give orders to the silver-haired girl. Liliana immediately opened the car door and the two knights jumped off the vehicle.

"What are you intending to do? Hurry and come back!"

"Annie-san, please rest assured! Leave it to Godou-san and the rest to handle this."

Yuri explained to the puzzled American.

As Yuri spoke, the spell words recited by the three outside the car could be heard.

"The one unblunted and unapproachable! Oath-breaking sinners be purged by the iron hammer of justice!"

"Eli Eli lama sabachthani? Oh Lord, why hast thou forsaken me? "

"People, listen to David's song of mourning! How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"

Godou first summoned the [Boar].

A day had already passed since the battle with Luo Hao, and Godou discovered he could summon the enormous black beast when the two giant apes came attacking from both sides.

Given a good foothold, the [Boar] alone was probably enough to finish them off. But on a mountain path like this, even the vigorous and enthusiastic boar would find it hard to go all out, which was why the knights were using the spell words of David and Golgotha to halt the monkeys' advance.

Erica summoned Cuore di Leone, shaping it into an arrow of steel and infusing the spell words into it. She then conjured a bow of steel and readied the arrow on it.

Liliana created the Bow of Jonathan and prepared the blue arrows of light.

The [Boar] charged at the giant ape in front while the red and blue knights pinned down the one in the rear.

The black divine beast rolled down the mountainside together with the giant ape, leaving the menacing giant ape in the rear who warily watched the bows and arrows of the two knights. A clear path had been opened.

The knights returned to the car, but just as Godou was about to follow, his legs lost strength and he collapsed.

"W-What is going on? My body..."

His body could not move and felt very exhausted. Godou was terrified by this feeling he had never experienced before.

This happened immediately after using the [Boar], could it be the result of the injuries from yesterday!? Come to think of it, the pain this morning was quite intense, but after moving his body for a bit, he had forgotten about it...

Realizing something was wrong with Godou, the apprehensive giant monkey in the back began to show an increasingly dangerous gaze.

—No. Danger was not limited to the rear.

A new giant ape appeared from the front; an unexpected third monkey. They were once again caught in a crisis with attacks from both sides!

"—Godou-san!" "Godou!" "Kusanagi Godou!" "Godoh, hurry and come back!"

The newly appeared giant ape approached, looking down on the defenseless Godou and silver SUV, and vigorously waved its arms.

At that very instant, spell words were heard.

"The many-fenced place of Izumo / Of the many clouds rising — To dwell there with my spouse / Do I build a many-fenced palace: Ah, that many-fenced palace! Seishuuin Ena has arrived!"

"Ena-san—!"

Hearing the one who announced her name fearlessly, Yuri's face brightened with happiness.

From amongst the leaves that were turning red, out jumped the uniformed girl. Carrying a Japanese sword, surrounded by strong gales swirling around her, the Hime-Miko of the Sword made her appearance.

Ena blocked the path of the gigantic ape from the front.

Around her, the wind's strength was increasing like a small-scale tornado. Though it was small-scale, it was clearly infused with divine power, for Ena had the ability to use the technique of divine possession. As her guardian deity, Susanoo — the storm god's authority was hers to command!

This tornado pushed back the arm of the giant ape.

What an embarrassment for a divine beast. The giant ape roared savagely, baring the sharp fangs in its mouth and started to spit crimson fire as if intending to incinerate Godou together with Ena.

But the storm god's tornado guarded the Hime-Miko of the Sword and repelled the flames.

"Across the fields and mountains / Setaria in a storm... The sounding gates of Awa / Whom shall determine their fate — !"

Ena leaped as if her body was as light as wind, and reached the giant ape's shoulder with one jump.

With a flash, her sword was embedded deeply in the giant ape's left eye. ROOOOOAAAAAR!

Painful roars came from the giant ape's mouth.

During this time, Erica ran out, picked up Godou's body and pulled him back into the car. At the same time, Liliana prepared to fire a second arrow from the Bow of Jonathan to pin down the giant ape which had resumed its advance from the rear.

The giant ape with one eye destroyed by Ena angrily waved its arms and legs around randomly, but the loss of depth perception made it impossible to hit its target.

Landing on the ground with leisurely grace, Ena ran towards the car.

"Annie-san, please hurry and go!"

Once her fellow Hime-Miko got in, Yuri hurriedly gave instructions.

Annie Charlton stepped hard on the accelerator, and the silver SUV shot forward, leaving the giant apes behind.

In his faint consciousness, the rescued Godou was vaguely aware of the voices of his female companions.

"Your Majesty, are you ok! Luckily Ena felt like it was about time for you to arrive, so I had been guarding this side of the mountain pass."

"Could it be... No, for sure he must be the king. In other words, one known as a Campione...! Are you one of his team members?"

"Team member? No, that's not the kind of relationship Ena has with him. Ena is His Majesty's woman. Well, I haven't been officially recognized yet, so maybe something like an underground lover? But I'm not the only one oh, everyone here is His Majesty's woman."

"U-Underground lover!? Everyone here is his woman!? N-Now that it is mentioned, I have heard that Japan's king is a terrible young sexual predator — I-I now understand."

Annie-san, you are mistaken, please don't misunderstand. Godou really wanted to get up and defend himself.

But before he could speak, Godou had already lost consciousness.

Part 3

It feels really hot. That was Godou's first thought as he woke up from a daze.

He could hear the sounds of girls in the surroundings. They seemed to be saying something. His mind still fuzzy, he opened his eyes and found some kind of mist or smoke hanging in the air. Could there be a fire?

No, it's steam. After blinking who knows how many times, his brain finally became fully awake.

"Ah, His Majesty is up."

"Godou, are you ok? Even though your body has already been treated, how do you feel now?"

From the left came Ena's voice while Erica could be heard from the right. As the mist drifted apart, Godou's brain and five senses began to recover their normal functions, and he was struck with utter shock.

"W-What the heck is going on! How did this happen?"

He immediately yelled. And no wonder it was so hot, he was currently immersed in an open air hot spring.

Hot water reached up to Godou's shoulders while his back was against the volcanic rock used to enclose outdoor baths. Naturally, Godou was completely naked except for the large towel wrapped around his waist.

And then, there were the two beauties right in front of him.

The blonde-haired blue-eyed Erica Blandelli. Seishuuin Ena with her black hair and black irises. Even though both of them covered their bosoms with a bath towel, their excellent figures were still clearly visible through the thin fabric.

Erica's bust and hip measurements appeared to be even bigger than the numbers on record.

However, Erica's impressive figure was not enough to overshadow the voluptuousness of Ena's body.

Perhaps due to the bath towels tightly wrapped around their bodies, the cleavage of the two girls was greatly emphasized. If only the water was from one of those murky hot springs, but unfortunately the water here was far too pristine and transparent.

The only object separating Godou from the naked bodies of the two girls was simply a bath towel.

It would be bad to keep staring, so Godou forcefully shifted his gaze to the distance. However, this only achieved the result of alerting him to the presence of the other two beauties in the bath.

"I-It is great that you have revived without issue."

"P-Please do not look over here, Godou-san!"

These two were Liliana Kranjcar and Mariya Yuri of course. Similarly, these girls' bodies were only obscured by a single bath towel each.

Liliana acted with great calmness.

However, her pale body had turned bright red from embarrassment. Even so, she maintained her usual awe-inspiring posture and did not try to avoid Godou's gaze.

Though her body lacked exaggerated curves, it made the subtle convexity even more conspicuous.

This was a mysterious fairy-like attractiveness that was possessed only by slender young Caucasian beauties.

Like a piece of artwork made of glass, there was a heightened sense of preciousness due to the fragility.

In complete contrast, Yuri was trying her hardest to shrink away and hide her body.

Though her posture did succeed in concealing her frontal view from others, her motions were not very elegant and one could still peek at her wonderful figure from the side.

Yuri's figure was not as voluptuous as Ena or Erica, but her body still had an abundance of feminine charm.

The curves were just right and one could only exclaim in wonderment at the two beautiful mounds that stood out as the only area capable of supporting the bath towel — the only fabric covering her body. The round and full curve from the small of the back to the buttocks was like an artistic masterpiece. Despite their slender nature, her thighs seemed particularly supple with a sense of lively beauty. Yuri's entire body was very perfect.

There was a subtle balance between beautiful curves and a sense of substance; in this regard, Yuri's body ranked amongst the highest levels.

"Hahaha, I see. I get it now!" Faced with this completely unreal scenery, Godou laughed as he muttered to himself.

"This has to be a dream. I must be so repressed during normal life for me to finally dream such a scene! No mistake about it!"

"What are you talking about, Godou? There can't be anything more real than this?"

"Yes yes. Look, doesn't this hurt? This is all happening in reality ."

At the same time as Erica was speaking, Ena pinched Godou's cheek. Ouch!

"I see. This is actually reality... Then may I ask, where is this place?"

"A hot spring at Lake Chuuzenji. The area has become a mess due to the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, and the impact has forced many hot spring spas to be abandoned, so we slipped into one of them."

Ena answered fluently, but Godou still had more questions.

"Then why am I immersed in the hot spring?"

"Your Majesty, please recall, didn't you collapse? Ena thought that bathing in a hot spring would be an excellent way to get rested."

"Ena told me about a folk remedy called hot water therapy, so this is a perfect opportunity to test it out."

Hearing the answers from the Hime-Miko of the Sword and the blonde knight, Godou looked up at the sky. It was almost dusk and the sun was gradually sinking west.

"And so I was immersed in this bath unconscious, is that right... "

"It's ok, in order to prevent Your Majesty from drowning, Yuri and Ena intended to enter the bath with you right from the very beginning — in fact, Ena often bathes in hot springs while in the mountains... And then Erica-san also came in, and following her was Liliana-san over there."

"Think about it, yesterday I said I wanted to have a dip in an outdoor hot spring, right? This is a great opportunity."

"I-I believe this is a meaningless act, which is why I tried to stop them! But Erica and Seishuuin Ena would not listen to my entreaties. With no other choice, as your knight I must supervise this suspicious folk remedy, and so I had to come."

"I-I... Because Ena-san said I must come along and forced me to enter! Do not misunderstand! I... I only came in here to stop Ena from going too far!"

The girls gave their various reasons for coming in here.

There were too many things to object and Godou couldn't respond to them one by one. However, the most pressing concern that needed to be addressed was —

"Fine, I have another question. Who took off my clothes?"

"As I am the one who proposed the idea, of course Ena has to bear responsibility."

"I also helped, oh? As Godou's lover, it is only natural."

"W-What the heck did you two do! If that is the case..."

Godou glared sharply at them. In a rare moment, these two fearless fellows averted their gaze.

"Hmm... Yes. Your Majesty, I am sorry... Ena saw it. At that time , I was thinking if you're dipping in the hot spring, then of course you have to be naked, so along the way I took it off."

"That's right, since it all came off, of course it's impossible not to see."

After Ena confessed, Erica also chimed in, a little embarrassed.

"But Your Majesty sure trained your body well, it is really cool with so many distinct ab muscles."

"Besides, Godou has already seen my naked body before, right? This is called equivalent exchange. It's just mutual admiration of our naked bodies, that's all."

Godou cursed the various reasons that led to this predicament.

Erica showed a proud expression that Godou hadn't seen for quite some time, whereas Ena looked rather apologetic.

"Then... As an apology, I don't mind if Your Majesty looks at Ena's naked body, oh?"

Her words had an explosive effect. Eh? Godou's brain froze from the shock for quite a few seconds.

"Since Erica says that things can even out this way, Ena will do the same. Sorry, this is Ena's apology. On further thought, since it's Your Majesty, I should have done this from the start. T-Though I'm still a little scared, but in the future I will have to carry your bloodline, and do this and that..."

Ena loosened the white bath towel around her body, and a thin piece of cloth began floating in the hot spring.

With a solid sense of weight, yet carrying an incomparable impression of gentle softness, the twin peaks looked elastic enough to bounce back quickly if one were to poke them with a finger. The most prominent positions in front were adorned by a faint color of pink.

Beneath the seductive and slender waist, the nether regions needed no further mention.

"Ah, Ena sure is unexpectedly bold. Everyday situations aside, I was suspicious what was going on when she had been acting so passively until now."

Erica threw out this comment coldly. The barbs contained in it lacked her usual elegance.

Possessing so many unconventional factors, it was very likely that Seishuuin Ena had already been classified by Erica as a dangerous contender she had to be wary of.

"Hmm, after all, Ena has had very few opportunities to build close relations with boys, so I don't really know how to talk to them... But no matter, I will not let this deter me!"

"Yes... Ena has come up with a great idea, actually I should have done this from the start. I must be a little slow not to have realized it earlier."

Even Erica's bath towel had been removed. Why do they have to get oppositionally defiant in a place like this!?

As Godou screamed for help in his mind, the body of a goddess was completely laid bare in full view.

The bosom that always declared its existence intensely in spite of clothing, now floated openly in the hot spring. It was impossible not to look. On the front of these breasts the size of small cantaloupes, there was a pair of flower buds attached like some sort of faintly red fruit; the waist was amazingly slender especially in contrast with the richness of the other two measurements — an extremely attractive tight and slim waist; finally beginning near the hips, the full and luscious buttocks were both seductive and adorable —

"Come, Yuri, take your bath towel off as well."

"No, hands off! Ena-san, please let go of me!"

"Seishuuin Ena! Stop this rude behavior immediately! I will not permit you to continue such unruliness!"

The naked Ena grabbed Yuri tightly.

As her childhood friend, the Hime-Miko, attempted to remove the bath towel on her body, Yuri looked like she was about to cry as she tried to escape. However, a corner of the towel had been caught, and her jade-like beautiful skin was revealed. In her efforts to stop these actions, Liliana's bath towel also loosened slightly.

Godou could not bear to watch any longer.

Immediately, he jumped out of the water and ran back to the changing room as fast as he could.

I can't stay in this kind of place! Run away! In order to preserve the integrity of his male dignity, Godou suppressed his desires and ran out impulsively.

Part 4

Fortunately, Godou's clothes were still in the changing room.

Drying himself off in a hurry with a towel he found, Godou frantically put on his clothes and walked out the corridor to the entrance. Ena was right; the hot spring really was a part of the hotel facilities.

Stepping outside the building, he discovered it was a small traditional hot spring resort.

Anyway, Godou's first goal was to calm down, so a brief stroll outside should suffice.

The resort was situated along the spectacular shore of Lake Chuuzenji. The leaves adorning the surrounding mountain range were colored in shades of red and yellow, and combined with the clear water of the lake, the wonderfully beautiful autumn scenery was difficult to describe.

There were many different shops and hotels along the shore of Lake Chuuzenji, such as western style hotels, stylistically distinct

western restaurants, coffee shops, etc. Shops were also spaced out quite generously.

At this moment, Godou noticed a monkey walking in front.

Based on its approximate height of 80cm and the red face, it seemed to be a Japanese monkey.

Their gazes met. The monkey repeated a series of brief cries of " kiii~~ kiii~~" as if making a greeting, and then carried on in its original direction.

That direction was towards a crossroad.

Anyway, Godou had already been informed beforehand that the ordinary citizens of Okunikkou City had all turned into monkeys. With an uneasy feeling, Godou began to run.

Chasing the monkey just now, Godou reached the intersection. Even though it was just a normal road, there was a massive red torii situated there. Compared to the traffic lights at the crossroad, it was roughly double in height.

This was one of Lake Chuuzenji's sights, the Red Torii.[55] Clearly a road like any other, except with a huge red torii over it, facing the tourist souvenir shops, eateries and all sorts of stores lined up on the main road.

Looking into the distance at such a scene, Godou sighed. It really was like a monkey kingdom.

—kii! kiikii. kikikii, kii~~!

—ki? kikiikikii, ki! ki!

The cries of monkeys came from all directions, and Lake Chuuzenji's hot spring street was full of people who had transformed into monkeys. Furthermore, there was a great abundance of species including Japanese monkeys, macaques, gibbons, baboons, chimpanzees, orangutans, mountain gorillas, etc .

There were even some that Godou couldn't tell what type they were. Like city pigeons that were accustomed to humans, they did not make loud noises or scatter when they saw Godou.

The monkeys dominated the shore of Lake Chuuzenji, and behaved very much like humans.

Some were taking photos with digital cameras (except holding them upside down with the lens facing the wrong direction). Some were working in shops doing something similar to what the staff did (except taking fistful of bills from the cash register and stuffing them in their mouths to chew). Some were ordering food (but poking their fingers into the soba noodles in the bowl, and eating directly with their hands), sort of.

The monkeys imitated humans, like a scene from a satirical play .

It might be considered interesting for a circus act, but Godou became angrier and angrier as he watched. As soon as the thought

that they were originally humans entered his mind, it was no longer funny at all.

"It is possible that they retain memories from when they were human."

A voice came from behind.

It was Annie Charlton, who was walking over.

"Looks like you have recovered, Godoh..."

"Yes, after a good nap, I'm fine now."

Godou nodded. His body felt very light and free without any sense of discomfort.

But how did this happen? Annie's eyes showed a vicious expression of extreme disgust.

"That cannot be the only reason... Just now, your girlfriends were competing to apply healing magic to you. In order to determine who was going to kiss you, they even broke out in argument. In the end, it was Ena who seized an opening, kissed you in your sleep, and applied the magic—"

"Something like that happened?"

Godou felt embarrassed that Annie witnessed what had happened.

"With magical power that can defeat divine beasts with ease... I can at least acknowledge your power as a king. But Godoh, for you to use the authority you usurped from a god to make so many girls into your candidate partners — no, treating them as playthings to satisfy your lust... It is truly shameless!"

Playthings!? Such unilateral thinking was too biased in perspective. Godou immediately objected:

"Please don't take Seishuuin Ena's words as the truth! They are just my companions and my friends. We are not in some kind of inappropriate mess of relationships."

"That sounds exactly like the explanation of politicians when scandals break out."

Annie's gaze and expression were as cold as ice.

"Although you have been in denial all this time, please bear in mind I already witnessed what happened at the resort just now. Your attempts to find weak excuses are futile."

"W-What are you talking about!?"

"W-Who could have thought such orgiastic gatherings existed in this world, I used to think they were simply rumors... I never expected someone I know to engage in such behavior. I was so shocked that I was driven away from the resort. To think there were five young adults, male and female, gathered in a bath, doing things completely naked..."

Oh my god. To think that Annie was aware of the commotion in the open air bath.

She knew about the shameless mixed bath and the inexcusable licentious behavior.

"P-Perhaps it was a bit noisy just now. But please, you must believe me! There is nothing inappropriate between us and we have never done anything crossing the line!"

"You dare say you have not done anything? Please give me a break. For you to engage in prurience all the time and offer such ridiculous excuses now, you are truly terrifying! T-That sort of ridiculously licentious behavior was something that I thought only existed in television drama series!"

The ethereal beauty was clearly shaken — Annie Charlton turned out to have surprisingly low immunity in such an area.

In the end, Godou had to wait for almost five minutes before she calmed down.

"There are still many things I must admonish you for such immoral acts, but I will put it aside for now. By the way, Godoh, I am very surprised that you are a king who acts quickly to handle situations."

Annie's tone of voice returned to the usual coldness, though the feeling of icy sharpness exuded from her beautiful face was still gone. It was apparent that she was still recovering from the shock just now.

"Ordinarily, do you Campiones not delay until the crux of the matter comes into play? All the devil kings in Europe do things in that manner."

It seemed like Annie's true nature was a clumsy person in contrast to her capable appearance.

Godou pretended not to see her efforts to recover her composure. This was the so-called grace of the warrior.

"It was just coincidence that an incident occurred right next to me this time. I'm not going to risk my life and throw myself at a situation without understanding the cause and circumstance. If the opponent is a god, caution is essential, which is why I don't want to be slacking off."

Godou continued to feign ignorance and clarified his principles.

Come to think of it, that fellow Doni really did nothing but fight gods. Compared to that idiot, Kusanagi Godou was truly industrious.

"What about Annie-san's companion? If he only sent his collaborator over here, then he must be a lazy and willful fellow too?"

"Pretty much... Though I believe he can still be considered hardworking."

Annie shrugged.

"He is a man who always says things like 'As long as I appear at the right time' or 'As long as there is a good end result.' But no other way around it, that is John Pluto Smith's style."

"Looks like his personality isn't very compatible with mine..."

"Who knows? You are very alike in your lack of common sense. You might get along very well after all. Anyway, rather than worrying about such issues of American-Japanese diplomatic relations, you should be concerned with the future of these people. "

Annie complained as she nonchalantly chastised both devil kings of Japan and America.

Her gaze was directed at the group of monkeys that used to be humans, the ones now engaged in crazy acts.

"The population in this area is roughly a thousand. These people, along with the tourists from outside, have all been turned into monkeys. In fact, similar incidents have occurred in the past."

"Incidents caused by gods?"

"Yes, a few years ago in a national park at Los Angeles, there was an incident with the appearance of Artemis, the goddess of the moon and beasts. At the time, the goddess transformed hundreds of people into deer, bears, boars, wolves and birds, but Smith finally prevailed over her."

At this point, Annie lowered her gaze and she whispered in a worried voice.

"But the people that transformed were unable to return to normal. They had no choice but to give up their human identities and continue living as wild beasts. I fear such a possibility might exist this time as well."

Discovering a new potential issue, Godou became speechless.

He had believed all along that the monkeys would turn back into humans once he defeats the Great Sage Equaling Heaven. Was this only wishful optimism?

Chapter 4 - Enter the Black Hero, the Great Sage Exhibits Steel's True Worth

Part 1

It was 6pm on the second day after their arrival at Nikkou.

Godou had re-entered the resort and was now in the men's bath . Previously, his mood to enjoy a good soak had been ruined completely, and this time he made sure to give the girls an express order of 'forbidden entry.'

"Come to think of it, those fellows' behavior was completely out of hand..."

Though the men's bath was not the open air type, the beautiful scenery of the shore of Lake Chuuzenji could be viewed through the window. However, night had already fallen and the scenery was no longer visible, so Godou watched the starry autumn sky instead.

...In a daze, he even recalled images from the mixed bath just now.

"D...Damn it, I have to dispel these unnecessary thoughts. Form is no different from emptiness, and emptiness is no different from form, *prajnaparamita*, *gate gate paragate*...?"[56]

In order to drive away those erotic memories, Godou began reciting fragments of scripture he could still remember.

"Isn't this the Heart Sutra translated into Chinese by Xuanzang the Monk? In a certain sense, you are currently reciting a divine spell intimately linked to the origins of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, one that seeks as its goal the realm of the void — hohoho... It's not a bad idea."

This wonderful voice, like a yueqin[57], surely belonged to no one else but that particular person.

Turning his head back, Godou found the transcendent beauty sitting on the edge of the bathing pool.

"For me to come this close without you being aware, you still have far to go. Reflect well on this, King Kusanagi!"

The one gazing at him with eyes of superiority was Luo Cuilian without a doubt. One couldn't possibly make a mistake in recognizing that unparalleled beauty.

The Leader of the Demonic Cult was wearing something like a yukata, whose fabric was so sheer that one could virtually see the jade-like skin glistening with beads of sweat underneath!

"Your Eminence!? How did you come here!?"

"Of course I escaped from the stone prison... King Kusanagi, Luo Cuilian is not one of those fools who make claims they clearly cannot fulfill. Are you trying to insult me?"

Seeing her severe glare, Godou felt himself breaking out in cold sweat.

"No, that's not it. I'm just very surprised that you were able to escape in such short time."

"In that case, that would be a more appropriate thought. In actual fact, I have yet to destroy that prison utterly. All I did was find a weakness and escape through it to the outside."

"A prison escape, in other words? ...You didn't destroy it?"

Godou simply said what he thought, but Luo Hao frowned.

"What shallow thinking. I am the Ruler of the Martial Realm. It is my policy to smash a prison completely at the moment of liberation from the humiliation of imprisonment, and walk out the front gates openly. Escaping from a prison like a rat is completely unacceptable! Today my only purpose is to see your face, and I shall be returning to the stone prison in a short while!"

Come on, this person seriously had way too much pride!

Godou couldn't help gazing at Luo Hao with eyes of concern.

"I can't agree completely, but I get what you mean. Anyway, why did you come to the bath?"

"Is there a problem? I already said I came to see you. If you are in the bath, then it is only natural for me to be here."

"That's not really right. You should wait outside until I finish my bath. Besides, why are you dressed like this...?"

Luo Hao was wearing a garment as light as gossamer. Rather than obscure, it heightened the sense of voluptuousness from her bountiful bust and hip measurements despite her very slender appearance.

"What kind of stupid question is this? Do people who enter baths in heavy clothing actually exist? King Kusanagi, are you taking me for a fool? Or are you—"

Watching Godou's face, Luo Hao appeared to have noticed something.

With an ominous feeling, Godou was quite sure that Luo Hao did not interpret his thoughts accurately.

"Your eyes seem to be looking down on me. You must be trying to say something like 'Ha, I am standing here completely unarmed and unclothed. If you don't do the same, you are a coward and weakling who lives by deceiving the world with the king's title.' That must be it!"

"Not even for one second did I consider something so stupid!"

"Hmm... You cannot stop looking at me in this manner? Fine, I, Luo Cuilian will show you proof that I have reached the pinnacle not only in martial might, but also courage and magnanimity."

Luo Hao reached to her sash and untied it after some slight hesitation.

With the sound of clothing sliding off bare skin, Luo Hao's sheer robe fell to the ground.

"Y-Y-Y-You! What do you think you're doing!?"

"Now that both sides are completely vulnerable, let us proceed with complete honesty and openness. Isn't this kind of interaction known as skinship in Wakoku?"

Saying that, Luo Hao stepped into the bathing pool.

With the orchid-like[58] beautiful body right beside him, and completely open to view without reservation, Godou entered a state of panic. Looking at her slim and slender figure, it was difficult to imagine where in her body that overwhelming might was stored.

In addition to a visage as beautiful as a flower and a waist as slim as a willow, the gracefully shaped breasts constantly flaunted their existence.

The cherry-colored flower buds in the forefront were also adorable to the extreme. The body, from the narrow waist to the

full and round buttocks, gave off a certain seductive sensuality, reminiscent of a tiger lily[59] blooming in the depths of a secluded mountain, alluding to the intoxicating fragrance of nectar hidden deep within.

Uncontrollably, Godou swallowed hard several times at the sight of naked Luo Hao's otherworldly and absolute beauty.

"...King Kusanagi, I have no intention of harming you, so you have no need to be wary of me. In order to show your magnanimity in return, please divert that sharp gaze of yours."

Luo Cuilian covered her bosom in the water with her right arm. A slight shade of pink entered her ivory-like complexion. Most probably, water temperature was not the main cause.

"...Please be more considerate towards a maiden like me. Your intense gaze is quite lacking in propriety."

"S-Sorry, I understand!"

Reproached by the naked beauty, Godou fixed his gaze outside the window.

"Ah... The natural spring water here is not bad."

Bathing as she looked into the distant starry night, the demeanor of the Ruler of the Martial Realm gradually relaxed. Her voice felt even calmer than usual, and carried an additional sensual feeling.

"B-By the way. Thank you for your help at Toushouguu."

"Not at all. I already explained at the time, I have my own plans . Anyway... The Great Sage seems to have released himself from the bonds of the [Keeper of the Horses] spell."

Luo Cuilian stood at the pinnacle of Daoist mastery.

As befitting of her stature, she noticed such developments immediately. She was no sheltered greenhouse flower after all.

"Yes, it also seems like he summoned helpers like Zhu Bajie and Sha Wujing. Things are getting more and more troublesome."

"Eh? One never expected the Great Sage to reach this stage so soon... So, King Kusanagi, do you still wish to fight as my representative? Perhaps you may feel that the caliber of your enemies have exceeded your capacity? I, Luo Hao, allow you to beg with crying eyes for me to save you."

"What do you mean... by that?"

"Hohoho, I may have saved you earlier for the sake of my honor , but the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, this peerless heroic god is my mortal rival after all. It seems a bit of a shame to miss the opportunity to finish him myself."

Should she be described as too tactless, or honest?

What she meant was, it would be a pity for her to give up the chance to show off, all because of a careless mistake. Realizing Luo Hao's intentions, Godou shrugged. This was his opportunity to get out of a fight against gods.

Let Luo Hao take on all of the risk and responsibility, and then leave this place — but what of Hikari? What about the people who had become monkeys? Most importantly, what about Godou himself? Could he allow himself to flee in the middle of a battle? The answer was obvious.

"I am grateful but I cannot accept your good intentions. It is too late for such words. This is my fight and I will handle that monkey . Please await the outcome of the battle from within your prison."

"...Oh? In other words, I, Luo Hao, no longer have a chance to shine?"

The impression given off by Luo Hao suddenly shifted, and acute battle spirit seemed to have made its way into her beautiful visage.

She no longer tried to cover her breasts, and her pristine body was revealed without reservation. Suppressing embarrassment with overwhelming will of battle, she stared at Godou directly from the front.

"Yes, during that time in the prison, you already yielded to me the right to this battle. If you must take it back no matter what, then defeat me first."

Of course, Godou knew full well the horror of Luo Hao from the memories deeply carved into his body.

However, this was not a time to back down. That's right, Kusanagi Godou wanted to fight the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, and for this he will put in everything he had.

"You are truly an incredible king. I originally thought you feared battle, and your usual speech and behavior made you look so weak. However, on the battlefield, you not only possess the courage and ferocity of a lion, but also the cunning and shrewdness of a fox or a wolf."

Luo Hao smiled tenderly.

"You possess dual qualities of uselessness and great promise that cannot be ignored. These opposites will be mixed together one day. Towards a young man with such an uncertain future... How should I, Luo Cuilian, respond?"

What was Luo Hao going to do? Attack in rage? Generously yield the opportunity to him? Or make some kind of deal in exchange?

All kinds of thoughts crossed Godou's mind as he gazed upon Luo Hao's body.

"We'll do it this way, Kusanagi Godou. Please use the term ' Onee-sama' to address me from now on."

"...What?"

As developments completely defied his predictions, Godou's thoughts froze for an instant.

"If I simply give up this opportunity because of a mere request, it would be a blemish upon the authority of I, Luo Hao. However, it would be different if the other party was related to me by a familial bond of a sworn pact."

Luo Hao revealed her idea proudly with great satisfaction. Undoubtedly, the levels of her pride had reached unimaginable heights.

"I was thinking, you are a youth who has gotten the better of me a number of times. Rather than eliminating you here like plucking a tender shoot, it would be better to cultivate you properly into a great hero. Such a course of action befits the Ruler of the Martial Realm... A-And besides, you and I have already reached the intimacy level of baring our unclothed bodies to each other."

Luo Hao's tone of voice suddenly lost that fear-inspiring quality , and she covered her breasts as if suddenly realizing something.

"As the saying goes, 'from an exchange of blows friendship grows,' which is why I will have a sworn pact with you, and I shall instruct you as your older sister. Dear adoptive little brother, in return you must repay me with utmost respect, and fulfill the duties of familial piety."

In the Oath of the Peach Garden[60], did the words 'though born on different dates, we hope our lives will end on the same identical day' refer to something like this?

Though this came out of the blue, Godou continued to listen, his paralyzed thought processes returning.

"I will shower affection and protection upon my adoptive little brother, and respect your authority over Wakoku, refraining from vocal criticism that interferes in your affairs. How's that?"

Luo Cuilian smiled faintly. It was a lovely smile much like the sun's reappearance after a violent storm.

Though a sworn pact felt rather unnecessary, the accompanying condition seemed quite attractive.

"Yes, very well. I am in your care, Your Eminence."

Though Godou accepted very quickly, Luo Hao glared at him severely in return. What went wrong?

"Little brother, how could you address your older sister like that ? Correct yourself in the manner I already explained."

"Uh, I...I'm in your care, Nee-san."

Godou truly found himself unable to call her 'Onee-sama.'

As a student who did not attend some sort of super high class young ladies' school, this was his absolute limit.

"Your words should carry utmost respect to an ultimate older sister like me. Anyway I shall let it slide for today. You need to show improvement next time."

What would count as improvement? Godou could not help agonizing.

"Once again, I shall return to the stone prison and lie dormant for now. Little brother, stand up."

As the two of them got up, Luo Hao kept her arm over her breasts while Godou covered his lower body with a towel.

In the next instant, something happened that was even more shocking than the sworn oath of fraternity. Luo Hao leaned tightly against Godou and suddenly kissed him.

"I am applying Daoist arts to your body, so do not move recklessly for now."

"!?"

"I am very impressed by your mettle, but your opponents are three gods. The odds are highly stacked against you. Your elder sister has used a Daoist art that will alert her, no matter where she may be, whenever your body is invaded by extraordinary divine power. When the decisive battle arrives, I will surely be present."

The sensations of the small cherry lips and the pristine white skin pressing tightly against him, made Godou's entire body stiff beyond compare.

This contact with the beautiful adoptive elder sister lasted for twenty seconds or so.

"T-The action just now cannot be disclosed to anyone else. Though you are my little brother now, if rumors of contact with a man were to spread, I will be secretly criticized by others for acting in a manner unbecoming of a maiden. F-For the sake of my honor — you must agree to this."

Having exhorted, Luo Cuilian's figure vanished like the glow of the setting sun.

In order to cool off his boiling brain, Godou jumped into the cold water pool.

Part 2

Having gained a sworn elder sister under such unexpected circumstances, Godou returned to the main hall of the resort for dinner.

With no one else other than his companions in this little inn that only had around ten guest rooms, they had essentially commandeered the entire place. All staff and guests had been transformed into monkeys and seemed to have run off to join their fellow monkeys in the main streets.

Examining the kitchen facilities and food supply, Erica suggested something like "since the food will go bad eventually, and feeding monkeys would be such a waste, it would be far better for us to make effective use of it." Thus, Yuri and Liliana went to work with the cooking.

After leaving their payment for staying and eating at the cash register, Godou decided to help out in the kitchen. Since Erica and Ena were no help at all, while Annie was a guest, this was the best arrangement.

By the way... This American guest's gaze followed Godou all along as he busied himself.

As if trying to verify the movements of a dangerous criminal, her gaze even showed occasional signs of wariness. Clearly, the notion that "Kusanagi Godou = public enemy of women" had become completely entrenched.

Under her surveillance, Godou made a number of dishes. Though he had many specialties, these were mostly dishes that went along with alcohol because they were taught by his grandfather or mother.

"...Seeing these dishes, really makes me want to have a drink!"

Ena murmured as she looked at the tray Godou balanced on his hand.

There was sashimi and salt-roasted rainbow trout. By lightly salting the skin and roasting a little, a completely new delicacy was created when eaten together with salmon. Other than that, Godou made Italian pasta with shrimp sauce, using garlic, chili and olive oil to sautee many small shrimps and garnishing with a dash of parsley to produce an excellent specimen of maritime-style cuisine.

"Come on, you're not Erica, please don't say strange things like that. I never thought Seishuuin would also be an accomplished drinker..."

"Ah, I originally wasn't planning on drinking because of the upcoming battle, but this taste would really go well with Japanese sake or white wine, though beer would not be bad either."

Listening to Erica's additional comment, Ena nodded frequently .

Godou deeply regretted not having learnt any homemade dishes that would be appropriate for a normal highschooler's lunchbox. On the other hand, Liliana and Yuri's serious efforts produced dishes such as trout meunière[61], deep fried fish, as well as mountain vegetable rice.

Godou did not reveal the fact that he had a conversation with Luo Hao.

After all, for something like that to happen in the bath, Godou found it difficult to explain. Furthermore, there were more pressing concerns to discuss.

"By the way, Liliana, is that visual investigative spell still blocked?"

"No, since we have entered the Great Sage's territory, there should not be any problems using it from within. Do we still need that spell?"

"I want to use it to locate the Great Sage."

Godou turned to Yuri after replying to the incredulous Liliana.

"My body has already recovered, so there is no point in delaying the battle with the Great Sage. However... the [Sword] is needed to fight him."

"Which is why we must carefully discern what kind of god the Great Sage is, correct?"

Yuri spoke softly.

"That's right, I have been thinking over many things since yesterday."

"Annie Charlton, may I have a word with you for a minute?"

The redheaded American woman showed surprise as Erica suddenly singled her out.

"Though we have teamed up temporarily, it doesn't mean that we must share all information. Rather, it should be stated that certain critical facts must be prevented from leaking out. What do you think?"

"...Looks like my presence is an inconvenience for certain discussions here."

The sword of spell words was Godou's trump card. Understanding Erica's intentions of safeguarding this secret, Annie got up and left them to discuss in private.

"Since yesterday, I have been thinking about how I should get along with everyone from now on — Erica, Mariya as well as Liliana."

After the guest had left, Godou explained cautiously.

"In other words, you wish to clarify our relationships with you?
"

"Finally some decisiveness, Godou, and your conclusion is?"

Liliana and Erica's answers were full of determined confidence.

"Yes, after all sorts of troubles, I have finally made a decision."

"Looks like it's time to determine who is the principal wife and who will be the concubines! What about Ena and Yuri? You will be marrying the two of us after all, right?"

"E-Ena-san, please do not ask about such matters, it... it is not very proper."

"...Seishuuin, what are you talking about?"

As Ena showed an expression of excitement, Yuri frantically admonished her.

Seeing everyone's solemn gaze focused on him, Godou stood motionlessly and stared blankly with a perplexed expression.

"To this day, I have always tried to avoid battles with gods as much as possible, but now the time for an unavoidable fight has come. Basically, I am going to become no different from other kings — detestable beings like Voban or that idiot Doni. This morning Mariya already said to me, who knows how many more gods I will have to fight over the rest of my life, and who knows when my life will be extinguished, therefore—"

As Godou expressed his innermost feelings, he felt fighting spirit flow out from within.

That's right, this is my true nature. This battle began far earlier than the moment of becoming a Campione. The humans who possessed the unrelenting will to oppose and defeat gods, were precisely the ones who gained such power to resist them.

"Even so, in my battles against gods, whether Erica, Liliana or Mariya, everyone... Everyone has been essential to me. For the sake of staying together with me, your lives will always be in peril. Will you continue to be my partners in spite of all this?"

Somehow Godou made a smile.

It was a slightly grotesque smile like a wild beast's, with the corners of his lips slightly upturned.

It was the mark of a king, the smile displayed when the joy of battle could no longer be suppressed.

"Protecting you all and never letting you die — those are words I will never say even if my mouth is forced and torn open. The

most I can say is this: if you are going to die, I will die together with you. Furthermore, when receiving everyone's help, that certain behavior will have to be performed as usual."

The girls were shocked into silence. It was only natural. Godou felt that it would be unbelievable if a boy made such stupid requests without being hated, but he was determined to clarify things.

It wouldn't do to be passively caught up into things step by step like the current incident. That was what Godou felt deeply about.

"I know very well that my demands are very off-putting. If anyone feels repulsed, they can depart from here immediately, and leave my side for now."

"Godou, is this what you mean by something important you had to tell everyone?"

Erica pursed her lips and frowned with displeasure.

"Didn't I swear an oath already? Even until the final moments of the world's destruction, I will forever stay with you."

"I will also follow you for a lifetime as your knight, and offer my undying loyalty."

"I already said this morning, I hope that Godou-san and I will be together as long as our lives endure. I am still waiting for your answer. What are you talking about at this time?"

Liliana declared with dismay while Yuri showed the angered look of a Yakshini[62], an expression she had not shown for quite some time. Ena also went "Ah~~ how disappointing" and shrugged her shoulders.

"Ah, no, but in the past these things were said in desperate situations under great duress. I just want to reconfirm how everyone feels, and make sure once again..."

Godou felt his determined spirit shaken by the unexpected responses, and took a few steps back in embarrassment.

In his current life, Godou was already well aware that compared to gods, girls were far more terrifying.

"Godou, may I ask you a question? The three of us... hmm, as well as Ena, will soon encounter a most desperate crisis."

"Ah? Sure."

Godou shrank back at Erica's sudden questioning.

"If you could only save one of us, who would you pick?"

"Hmm... Of course everyone, I will save everyone together."

Although Godou answered quickly without hesitation, the three girls could not help but sigh at the same time. Only Ena was happily going "How befitting of His Majesty! That's the way things should be done!"

"I already said, only one person can be saved. A choice cannot be avoided."

"How could I possibly make such a choice? Isn't it better to save everyone? What a strange question."

"Actually, Godou's lack of hesitation on the subject of selecting someone is even stranger. No matter, that is why you are our king."

As Erica spoke, Liliana and Yuri nodded in agreement.

"As mentioned just now, I have sworn eternal loyalty before everyone else and I am the woman who bears Godou's protection. This is simply acknowledgement of my earned merit as Godou's wife."

"Protection? From the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi incident?"

Liliana was very concerned after hearing Erica's statement.

"The [Youth] incarnation used that time? When I asked Godou about the details he only stuttered with misleading answers, while Erica played dumb all along. In the end, it became some kind of secret—"

"Rather than secret, it is better described as private."

"Private!? Could it be, that Godou and Erica did something indecent again!? If that is the case, then the eternal loyalty mentioned just now was referring to that!?"

Erica's smile carried mysterious airs, while Yuri looked shocked .

Furthermore, Ena was throwing glances of "Wow! That's His Majesty! So very cool!" whereas Liliana bore an expression that seemed to say "You are that kind of person, no surprise there."

"Back then, Godou was ferocious, forceful and very strong like the times when he is in battle. It made me feel like I could offer up this body for your pleasure. However—"

Erica professed as if intoxicated, but quickly changed expressions.

"Putting all this aside, there are issues I need to know. Godou, do you plan on taking Ena, Yuri and me into your embrace as lovers?"

"No, I've never even thought about that..."

Godou answered with irritation, but this provoked the Hime-Miko's displeasure.

"Eh eh? Your Majesty is so mean! Didn't you say you were going to take care of me along with Yuri... Ah, I get it now. Sorry, looking back, it really was an unreasonable demand."

Ena looked down as if she realized something.

"Uh, you finally understand what I meant, right? Seishuuin."

"Yes, but it doesn't matter. Ena will act modestly until Your Majesty comes to love Ena. But please summon Ena if you ever have the whim. Ena doesn't need the principal wife's position. Even as Your Majesty's secret lover that cannot be exposed to the world, I am fine with it. Please arrange things however Your Majesty finds convenient."

"Don't speak like that when you are an unmarried maiden!"

Ena's forthright attitude completely ignored society's moral expectations, and casually spoke terrifying words.

Godou clutched his head in frustration. It seemed like Ena had undergone Yamato Nadeshiko education like Yuri, which accounted for this anachronistically submissive conception of male-female relationships.

"What do you actually see in me to say things like this!? Please, treasure yourself more!"

"It is because I treasure myself that I wish to stay by the side of the one I love most — Your Majesty. Your Majesty is very powerful, very dashing, and very compatible with Ena, and also... The first for Ena to offer her kiss, and lay bare her naked body..."

Ena's face went red as she confessed.

In that instant, Liliana's face seemed to say "Are you still lacking in self-awareness?"

"Listen to what has been said, Kusanagi Godou, this is the truth. You possess the unaware talent of gathering women. This is why you need someone by your side to offer reminders and advice."

What was all this about? The original intention was to confirm their determination before the battle, and get everyone to unite.

At this time, Erica gave yet another heavy blow to Godou who was already at the end of his wits.

"If I'm not mistaken, I stated clearly before that Godou is only allowed two lovers — Yuri and me, but in this brief time just short of six months, you not only captured Lily but Ena as well, exactly like a Don Juan.[63] By the way, Godou, didn't you once say something like 'relations should develop slowly', is that correct?"

"T-That's right."

"If you also take Ena as a lover, it doesn't contradict your words, but even if you conquer her slowly, I will not accept it!"

If you want to go out and womanize, you'd better placate the one at home first.

Keeping the reins of the wayward husband tightly in her hands, was exactly the skill possessed by the principal wife.

"I will not go easy on you if it really happens. But if you are determined to go through with it no matter what, I demand reasonable justification along the lines of affirming that I am the

one you love most. Should you fail to do something like that, I will never accept Ena as your lover, got that?"

Issuing her ultimatum to Godou, Erica was like a queen who challenged the devil king.

The other three watched this scene unfold with great interest. How did it come to this? Just as Godou stood there in shock, Yuri unexpectedly stepped forward.

After leaning close to the window and looking outside diagonally, she slowly turned her head back.

"...The Great Sage Equaling Heaven has awoken. I believe he will be descending here very soon."

Yuri informed everyone the oracle she had received through spirit vision.

Hearing the news, Godou quickly recovered his senses, dispelling the feelings of intimidation from Erica and the girls that was overwhelming him. The swiftness of the change came as a surprise, even to himself.

"I've decided to check out the Great Sage's condition. Everyone get ready."

"Are we going to fight now, Kusanagi Godou!?"

Godou shook his head at Liliana's question. It was still too early for that.

"No, I have no intention to fight yet, since the required weapon against that monkey hasn't been prepared yet... So Mariya, there is something I must rely on you."

"Yes, very well."

"I hope you can use spirit vision to discern clearly what kind of deity the Great Sage Equaling Heaven is. The earlier the [Sword] can be used, the better."

Yuri answered 'yes' to Godou's instructions and shyly lowered her gaze.

"In other words, after capturing the Great Sage's divinity with spirit vision, Godou-san and I will be..."

"Yes, that included. I will do everything I can to escape and prepare a counterattack for the second round. As for your question this morning, I will take this opportunity to answer it. I will persevere and always have you by my side, as long as you don't mind the kind of fellow I am."

"Yes!"

Yuri's expression brightened immediately.

As he pondered over these things, Godou walked towards the entrance of the inn. In the end, the matter with the girls was cast aside once again as a battle with a god approached. Just as usual, for the sake of battle, in other to obtain victory, he was forcing them again.

Perhaps this personality of his would persist until the day he died.

The answer to Erica's sudden question was no longer important. Squarely facing the personality flaws he had always been vaguely aware of, Godou stepped outside.

Part 3

On the peak of Nantaisan, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong jumped up to a start.

As things stood, his figure was still in the form of Mariya Hikari . Gazing up, the vast heavens was filled with twinkling stars. He must have slept for roughly half a day.

Despite the hard surface of the mountain being used as a bed, he had rested soundly. After all, he was the divine monkey born from stone and a sturdy soldier, with few demands in everyday comforts.

"Now, what should I do with my kingdom next?"

Even if he didn't use clairvoyance, the Great Sage could survey the entire Okunikkou area with normal vision as he looked down from the mountain.

At the foot of Nantaisan were the wide streets around Lake Chuuzenji.

North from there were the plains of Senjougahara, and even the hot spring street of Okuyumoto could be seen. There were also the streets next to Lake Yunoko, and the villages gathered all sorts of different monkeys, carrying on their lives with a hint of human feeling. The might of the Great Sage's divine power apparently reached that area too.

Even so, the Great Sage was not in the least amused.

"This is a bit too quiet. Things need to be more lively, what should I do?"

The Great Sage twisted his head, trying to come up with things that could be accomplished with monkey intelligence. Nothing came to mind so he stood upside down, and with no ideas still, he made a somersault. Finally after a while, he clapped his hands.

"Thinking over again and again, the people of my past kingdom were prepared for battle against the heavenly armies with great enthusiasm and hot-blood. What these guys lack is ambition and the spirit of conquest."

What a great idea, let's run with this. The Great Sage Equaling Heaven immediately summoned a golden cloud.

Somersaulting onto it, he rapidly descended to the ground surface. That sort of speed was like lightning, and all mortal eyes could see was a flash of golden light.

Despite all their powers, Devil King Campiones were neither omnipotent nor invincible.

Especially those young fellows, they often had weaknesses. Feeling that Kusanagi Godou was the same, Annie left the resort. After all, she had little interest in finding out the secrets of other kings.

Annie casually strolled along the shore of Lake Chuuzenji, but suddenly saw a flash of light descending from the sky, landing in a central street where the bulk of the monkeys were gathered. Annie instantly ran towards the location.

Concealing herself as she approached the scene, she was met with a very repulsive sight.

"All day long the superior man is creatively active. At nightfall his mind is still beset with cares. Danger. No blame. Wavering flight over the depths. Flying dragon in the heavens. It furthers one to see the great man. Arrogant dragon will have cause to repent. There appears a flight of dragons without leadership!"[64]

The one reciting spell words was a young girl standing on a golden-colored cloud.

The cloud was hovering about 10m above the ground, overlooking all sorts of monkeys gathered in the streets near Lake Chuuzenji.

"The Creative works sublime success / Furthering through perseverance!"

It was the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong, the one who was occupying the body of Mariya Yuri's younger sister.

The monkeys on the ground knelt in prostration and worshiped the monkey god like a goddess, but as the Great Sage's spell words worked their effects, the underlings began to undergo changes.

The monkeys with origins from all over the world, gathered here without any organization or sense of principle, began to transform in appearance. Their eyes twisted with ferocity and they bared their teeth.

Wrath and apprehension, as well as murderous intent, all appeared on their faces. At the same time, there were also subtle changes to the monkeys' body. For example, the Japanese monkeys ' claws became like sharp knives, while the gorillas expanded several times in size to become giant brutal gorillas.

Some of the chimpanzees' mouths gaped wide open, and out flowed saliva dripping on the streets that dissolved the asphalt as if it was strong acid.

All the monkeys were full of murderous intent and had become very violent.

Threatening their neighboring companions, they even began to fight! Biting, scratching with their claws, spitting things like acid or flames from their mouths.

Like a tragicomedy, the peaceful monkey kingdom transformed into a realm of bloodthirst in an instant.

Furthermore, at this time, one of the monkeys came before Annie who had concealed herself.

It was a gibbon with claws as sharp as blades.

Kisyaaaaaaaa!

Making such a terrifying noise, the violent gibbon made its attack. Could it be possible that the monkeys were given orders to attack people on sight!? As Annie leaped back to avoid the attack, she began to chant spell words.

"Pentacle of the ages! Grant unto me thy protection!"

The gibbon made cries of fear and reluctance as it crashed into the invisible barrier.

As a mage, Annie was around upper average in ability, but purely in terms of magical power, she surpassed the most elite of magi by far.

This number of enemies was nothing to worry about.

Annie continued observing, protected by the invisible shield.

The gibbon in front, as well as monkeys nearby which had begun to close in on Annie's location, charged at the invisible barrier with great determination and bloodlust.

It seemed like they were especially aggressive towards humans.

Chanting spell words in the air, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven gave Annie a side glance. Gods were always arrogant and viewed humans as mere toys. No matter how much the world had changed, even though the human world existed for humans to live in, it was all just a playground to them in the end.

Should I get changed? And transform into the black-clad demon who saves the people and protect the powerless.

Annie abandoned such thoughts.

It was too early. Laziness was not the reason why John Pluto Smith sent his assistant to investigate first. In a battle, he had two main authorities — metamorphosis and the magic gun, but both of them were accompanied by restrictive conditions.

Using these authorities without consideration would quickly attract attacks from all directions. It was necessary to get a handle on the situation first.

At this time, Annie's cellphone made a noise. It was a text message.

This was a cellphone rented from a shop at the airport for usage in Japan. The message came from the other Campione, for they had exchanged numbers when the decision to team up was made.

Annie returned to the resort and met up with Kusanagi Godou's group.

Through the results of spirit vision and investigative magic, they already knew the Great Sage had appeared.

Thereafter, they all began to advance on the main road where the Great Sage had descended — National Route 120.

Along the way, they were met with attacks from berserk monkeys, but the group easily reached their destination without peril.

Around the monkey king, the violent monkeys began to riot, jumping up and down, creating quite a commotion.

Hidden behind a building, Annie and the rest began to scout.

"How is it, Mariya Yuri? Have you obtained some kind of hint?"

"No, not yet. Perhaps this distance is too far away as feared..."

Yuri replied to Liliana's question with melancholy.

This team's primary objective was to analyze the divinity of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven. This appeared to be related to Kusanagi Godou's powers.

"Whenever Yuri discerned a god's origins with spirit vision, she was always closer to them than this. To expect a result by spying from far away is too naive after all."

"The phenomenon known as spirit vision will not occur when it comes to matters of personal interest or benefit."

Met with the problem raised by Erica, Ena answered in a matter-of-fact manner.

"Nothing ventured, nothing gained..."

As the Campione and the king, Kusanagi Godou muttered softly to himself.

"No other way, I will pay the Great Sage a visit. When gods like these catch sight of kings like me, they usually ignore ordinary people, right? Let's take advantage of that."

"It's too dangerous, Godou, I will come along."

"Even if Erica comes with me, it will still be dangerous. Think of a better plan, there must be better ones? If I run into trouble, I will be relying on you all."

After Kusanagi Godou finished the discussion with his lovers, their plan was put into action.

He stepped headfirst into danger alone, and expressed great care and concern over the girls who were his lovers. Such behavior was completely opposite to the predictions of John Pluto Smith — or in other words, the collaborator Annie.

What was he going to do next? Annie felt herself greatly piqued with curiosity.

Part 4

Godou slowly walked towards the divine monkey that held dominion over Hikari's body.

At least he wasn't completely unarmed. In his shirt pocket was Cuore di Leone which Erica had transformed into a metal plate the size of a card.

This was the intersection of main roads at the shore of Lake Chuuzenji.

The monkeys gathered in the area began to rouse as they spotted the human Godou.

Ferocious stares, threatening expressions and gestures, and even appetites for human flesh were conveyed through their eyes like stabbing knives.

One would not have expected such brutality from monkeys that originated from leisurely humans.

"Sigh, too noisy! Shut up and be quiet, and scram!"

Standing on a golden cloud, Hikari gave a great shout from midair.

The monkeys scattered instantly, fleeing in all directions. This was going to be one on one. The Great Sage Equaling Heaven manipulated the apprentice miko's body, and nimbly landed on the ground.

"My kingdom is built, and I also had a good nap. I want some exercise next, and here comes a godslayer... How gratifying!"

The Great Sage declared using Hikari's voice.

Godou's body and mind were prepared for battle, and power flowed continuously from within.

...However, it was strange. Godou quietly tilted his head in puzzlement.

Earlier at Toushouguu, the Great Sage displayed immense divine power that far surpassed all the gods he had ever met, but now nothing could be felt. Of course, there was no doubt that the Great Sage was a very powerful god...

"Hahaha, you also look like you have fully recovered. I will use the legend of facing off against the heavenly armies at the Mountain of Fruit and Flowers as a model for our duel here. Even if you object, you will not be able to escape."

"Don't joke around, who wants to fight that kind of battle with you!"

Godou answered, casting all concerns aside. His current objective was to stall for time.

"You've already released that whatever Keeper of the Horses spell, right? If that's the case, you no longer require the power of the miko you possessed — Hikari, right? It's time you give her back to me!"

The Great Sage began to smile using Hikari's face.

Though she was already twelve years old, she bore an even more immature looking smile as a result of the god residing in her body.

"You really are infatuated with this miko, oh? If that's the case, you cannot escape as long as I keep this fellow in my clutches. Hehe, if you want to take her back, make your point with the fist. So then, let the blood-boiling, muscle-twitching games begin!"

A steel staff suddenly appeared in the Great Sage's hand. No mistake, it was the Ruyi Staff!

"Master of the Water Curtain Cave in the Mountain of Fruit and Flowers, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong announces his presence! Speak your name!"

"Kusanagi Godou! Let me tell you beforehand, I don't have a title as long as yours."

With the sound of rushing wind, the Ruyi Staff was casually swung over. Sigh, it really turned out like this after all.

The staff of steel smashed heavily towards Godou who jumped to evade.

"I, Wandering Monk Sun's Ruyi Staff was forged from precious divine iron. The iron staff that shakes the heavens and the earth, terrorizing the blue sky, savor it well!"

The first strike was quite fast, and the speed likely exceeded a 160kmh fast ball pitch.

However, the staff became faster and faster, and its motions were like lightning as the Great Sage wielded it with a combination of monkey-like agility and lightning speed.

I can't see it! Godou recalled his earlier battle with Perseus.

The current speed matched that of the glorious hero who displayed movements like flashes of white lightning. Faced with an opponent whose motions were impossible to capture visually, Godou began to use the [Raptor] form.

The power of god speed and jumping ability was unlocked only when facing high speed attacks.

Furthermore, Godou had discovered a new way to use it when he tested it in the battle against the beauty who had just become his sworn elder sister.

In the process of using the [Raptor], Godou's senses and reactions were accelerated as well, and there was a wondrous feeling as if the surroundings were being played back in slow motion.

In this decelerated world, Godou was the only one who could move normally. That was how the [Raptor] was used normally.

However, this time Godou suppressed his speed as much as possible while making movements.

As the Ruyi Staff was slowly thrust forward, the tip inched its way towards Godou's throat, but Godou remained completely motionless, shutting off the [Raptor]'s speed. He reactivated the [Raptor] when his throat was one or two centimeters from being pierced.

Super acceleration. The [Raptor]'s speed was infused in his body, but only employed for an instant.

This was sufficient, and good enough to evade the Ruyi Staff's attack. Godou was missed by 10cm, and the attack was evaded splendidly.

"...Oh?"

The Great Sage grumbled and instantly raised his attack speed.

The Ruyi Staff roared and sparks flew as it went through a series of attacks.

Tracing out arcs in the air as it approached Godou from all sorts of directions, it was like one of those martial arts movies from Hong Kong where Shaolin monks displayed staff skills, except several hundred times faster.

The series of attacks continued like a barrage of wind and thunder, but Godou dodged them all with the same principle as before.

The importance of rhythm was realized during his battle with Luo Hao. It was not necessary to use super speed all the time. During that time, he discovered the defensive technique of applying godly speed only at critical moments of need.

"Yes, you are defending well against Old Sun's Ruyi Staff! That's what a true devil king is about!"

The one who gave such praise was the Great Sage who was also the second daughter of the Mariya family. Her ankle had also connected with Godou's right leg at the same time.

Godou kept the speed of the [Raptor] suppressed, and releasing it only when he was 10cm away from striking his target. This was a most excellent sweeping kick.

"Uh, this splendid kicking is quite scary. Hahaha, nice!"

Though he wasn't swept off his feet, the stumbling Great Sage laughed.

The success of the attack also owed itself to using speed judiciously. In the past when under high speed, Godou was unable to make precise movements and often missed his enemies by 50cm when he tried to attack.

Now, he attacked using normal speed and only accelerated at the very end.

Using this method, he was now able to make highly precise movements that had previously eluded him.

However, the Great Sage's confidence gave an ominous feeling. As Godou continued to face off using godly speed, Hikari's expression gave a heavy impression of 'I haven't gone all out yet.'

Where's the signal? Godou's anxiety slowly built up.

Meanwhile, during Godou's confrontation with the Great Sage, the girls had also begun their operations.

At a certain memorial plaque on the lake shore, they were discreetly watching the situation between the god and the Campione.

In order to secure their escape route, Annie had been sent on a solo mission. The current people present were the two Great Knights and the two Hime-Miko, a total of four remaining.

The one assigning tasks was, of course, the [Diavolo Rosso].

Erica spoke to her childhood friend:

"Lily, we have to create an opening to let everyone escape and rescue Godou."

"Understood. But then, will spirit vision really work?"

Liliana looked worriedly at Yuri.

Whenever one desired strongly to see something, one would not be able to see it easily. Erica already knew of this unwritten law in the field of spirit vision. "The success of spirit vision is up to the heavens" was something that Yuri often repeated as a reminder .

However, those words seemed doubtful considering Yuri's high success rate. Then again, Yuri might be subconsciously raising her success rate by telling herself this again and again.

"I will make it work somehow... After all, there were a few occasions when I received divine inspiration according to my will. If I do it in the same manner, it might work."

"Gaining insights according to you own will? Even for Mariya Yuri, that seems hard to believe."

Denying Liliana's objections, the premier Hime-Miko Ena spoke up:

"I see. That particular method you learned in the Netherworld, Yuri?"

"Yes, due to the Memories of the Void floating everywhere in that realm, that ability could be used easily at will. I think using it in the real world will greatly strain one's body, but the method should be the same."

Yuri had already changed into her miko outfit before she left the resort.

To raise her mental concentration, she began to chant the Hime-Miko's spell words under everyone's gaze.

"Once upon a time in the great kingdom of Tang, a child entered the mountain forest in spring and was never seen again. The parents ventured on a search but never encountered the child. Lamenting 'our child, our child' they mourned the child's death and were turned into spirit birds, sorrowfully singing every spring ."

Praying with her hands together before her chest, Yuri closed her eyes.

If one were to make a painting of the proper figure of this pious miko praying in earnest, it would surely result in a moving work of art.

"Form is no different from emptiness, Yuri. Moving your heart as close to the Netherworld as possible will make your spirit more sensitive."

"Is this knowledge gained from Japanese wizardry?"

As Erica asked after hearing the advice, Ena proceeded to explain concisely.

"Form is no different from emptiness, and emptiness is no different from form. Form itself is emptiness, and emptiness itself is form — everything that possesses form in this world are akin to illusions. On the other hand, the truly intangible has their own form. This was taught by the great Avalokitasvara.[65] This is all because the Netherworld is that kind of place."

This was only natural, as the Netherworld referred to by the Hime-Miko was known as the psychic world to European magi.

It was a world where spirit and ectoplasm ranked higher than the material body.

"I have almost reached the realm where 'form is no different from emptiness.' Once I get there, the kind of spirit vision I used in the Netherworld should be possible."

"Yuri has been there before, so she should have grasped the technique... It should only be a matter of difficulty now."

This was the forthright girl unfettered by society or common sense, but at the same time a high class young lady with excellent upbringing and a multitude of mastered skills.

Catching a glimpse of Ena's facets, Erica frowned lightly. Though she maintained her graceful demeanor, she could already predict that this premier Hime-Miko will turn out to become the [Diavolo Rosso]'s greatest enemy.

"By the way, Seishuuin Ena, can your divine possession be used anywhere?"

Liliana entered the conversation without conscious intent.

"Speaking from a witch's instincts, it is an ability that obtains power on the level of a demigod or divine beast. However, it most likely places a heavy burden on the body."

"Liliana-san is on the right track. Yes, even for Ena, the conditions of using the technique are rather stringent."

Though she smiled cheerfully, the content of her response was in no way casual.

"Basically like running a complete marathon at full speed? Extremely exhausting in mental concentration. After using it once, the body feels like it has been completely hollowed out for a week. While using it, there is no guarantee of safety and death could result in the worst case scenario. However, when the necessary situation arises, Ena is prepared to use it without hesitation, so don't worry."

This was the answer of the Hime-Miko of the Sword who was well accustomed to harsh training.

Erica knew from her investigations that the Hime-Miko would undertake such training regularly in order to purify their minds and bodies of accumulated worldly influences. They always entered deep into the mountains because living too long in urban settings will render divine possession impossible.

However, Seishuuin Ena was formidable not only because of divine possession.

First of all, her usual behavior lacked feminine delicacy but she was at the same time a beautiful girl with an outstanding face and figure. She could easily get close to Godou like a male friend but display feminine wiles in unexpected areas, easily manipulating his affections within the palm of her hand.

Whether as a woman or a knight, Erica had realized this was a very difficult opponent to handle. Just now the issue she raised with Godou was interrupted, but she really had to settle the matter properly without loose ends in the future.

As she steeled her determination, Erica led the other knight away from the two Hime-Miko.

The spell they were going to use next required great concentration. The ritual she was going to perform together with Liliana was fully prepared. Its success would directly determine the survival of everyone in the group.

Meanwhile, the battle between Godou and the Great Sage had reached a climax.

Even for Ena's level of dynamic vision, their speed was frighteningly fast and impossible to capture. As the Great Sage smashed down his Ruyi Staff again and again, His Majesty

continuously evaded each attack by a paper-thin margin. This was a fight that could only be watched clearly by a martial artist who had perfected the mind's eye.

Amongst the masters in the Imperial Capital, there were only two or three who had attained this level.

Facing the intense battle, the Hime-Miko Mariya Yuri closed her eyes and focused on praying. What she must discern was the divinity of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong.

Ena felt rather regretful that Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi was not by her side.

That divine sword was also a member of [Steel] and they would have a better chance with another member of the gods on their side. If her former partner was still in her hand, she could learn the knowledge and transfer it to Kusanagi Godou.

That said, it was rather surprising that the exceptionally serious possessor of spirit vision would take initiative to such an extent. In the past, she was a girl who would adhere rigidly to the rules no matter what.

"...Girls will change themselves for the sake of boys. Grandma's so right!"

When she first read Kusanagi Godou's profile, Ena already felt that he was an interesting person.

He had a modest personality, common-sense behavior, and a pacifist lifestyle. Even so, he occasionally acted in slightly odd ways. From the perspective of Ena who wasn't bound by ordinary rules, it was like the joy of meeting a long-lost brother. However, it seemed like the honor student Yuri was even more suited to him.

In actual fact, having witnessed all sorts of messy situations that arose from the results of Kusanagi Godou's actions, Ena was convinced of one fact.

He is my husband, the man decided by fate.

In order to ensure the continuation of the Seishuuin bloodline, she was obliged to bear children sooner or later. However, Ena had never met a boy who suited her until now.

Faced with Ena's lack of common sense, those fellows reacted with either shock, anger or flattery. Too bad, they were not qualified to be with Ena. In this aspect, Kusanagi Godou was fundamentally different from them.

Ena had not expected Godou to make her heart race this much, but still she dealt with it calmly.

Ena did not mind those who indulged in lust. As far as a daughter of the Seishuuin family was concerned, there were plenty of fellows (and even listed in the family records) who indulged in collecting beauties. On this point, Godou was actually a lot better than them.

Though he still had no intentions of getting married yet, it was fine even if all she obtained was his bloodline.

Even though a king's powers were not hereditary, being a descendant offered substantial influence in the wizardry world. European magic associations were commonly led by, or even founded by those hailing from the lineage of kings.

Taking the Copper Black Cross as an example, ten-odd generations ago, their commander-in-chief was a king's illegitimate child.

He was treated like royalty, and in fact, members of the Blandelli family like Erica are his descendants.

...Thus, Ena focused her attention on the battle of the man whom she had been fated to encounter.

"This is not going well, if it continues, His Majesty will be more and more disadvantaged. In order to escape, he'd better hurry."

Ena's natural battle instincts clearly discerned the tides of victory.

Kusanagi Godou was having a battle of god speed against the Great Sage Equaling Heaven.

It was apparent that the latter was vastly more experienced in high speed battle than the former, and the Great Sage surpassed

His Majesty's movements for the first time. Clearly they were supposed to be equal in speed but it could be seen that the Great Sage was gradually catching on to Kusanagi Godou's motions.

Due to the extreme speed, Ena could only vaguely catch part of the action, but she was able to understand the overall tide of the battle.

The Great Sage's Ruyi Staff seemed to be swiping from the right but it was only a feint. As Godou dodged horizontally, the Great Sage made a middle spinning kick from the left. Using this principle, the Great Sage gradually undermined Godou's position.

Feints and diversions.

Since Godou was unable to attack Hikari's body directly, the tides of battle would turn for the worse if things continued like this . He will be defeated. Ena unsheathed the sword she had received from the collection at the Sayanomiya residence.

If anything happened, she would use divine possession to assist .

Having summoned Susanoo's divine spirit earlier in the daytime, she could only use the technique for a short time longer, or else there would be a heavy toll on the body.

During the playful ruckus at the open air bath, the Hime-Miko of the Sword did obtain a little rest for her mind and body.

Whenever possible, three days of rest was best, though reaching peak condition required a week's time.

However, when the necessary time comes, Ena will use it without any fear. As the woman with the prepared determination to serve His Majesty, this was only natural. Ena squinted as it was about time to enter the fray.

"...Far away mountain wilderness, resting in the grassy plains. The lineage of steel is the way of the sword. Wielding the bow on horseback, carrying fierce thoughts in pursuit of flocks of sheep, capturing prey. Sing praise to the ancient way of the brave."

Yuri lightly pleaded with a hoarse voice.

Opening her eyes, her body swayed as she looked at Ena.

"Yuri, you got it, right? The true identity of the monkey who stole Hikari's body, you know it?"

"Yes, so it is fine now, you can... Godou-san..."

The Hime-Miko possessing the spirit eyes fell forward as she spoke.

Surprised, Ena frantically caught her. Yuri's body was frighteningly hot, especially her forehead when Ena tried to touch it.

"Using spirit vision like this is really reckless, that should have been realized from the start. But Yuri, you actually accomplished it !"

Ena took out the device she was entrusted with as she called to her childhood friend.

This was Annie Charlton's personal gun, a slender revolver. As Ena fired the signal, an unexpected result occurred.

Affected by the feints, Godou began to fail in his evasions.

Receiving injuries on his arms, shoulders and thighs, the battle had turned for the worse. Being unable to counterattack was truly painful. With that, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven halted the attacks.

"...I see, you are concerned with this little lady possessed by me. "

The Great Sage finally realized the reason for Godou's unnatural way of fighting.

The monkey king occupied Hikari's body as he scratched her face in thought.

"Hmm, it's as if I was using this little lady as a hostage. No good , that's really no good. Doesn't that make me seem just like a villain !"

"What do you mean by 'seem', you were clearly an evil villain all along!"

Faced with the Great Sage's stupid comments, Godou finally burst out with a retort.

"Hmm, it's true that I have done all sorts of naughty things. However, being thought of as a petty villain feels surprisingly unpleasant. I, Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong, need to establish proper solemnity of presence after all!"

This monkey turned out to be even more vain than expected.

In front of the surprised Godou, the Great Sage began forming complicated mudras with his hands.

"Looks like it is time for me to show my true form. I hereby pray for dustless calm repose, hah!"

Golden-colored smoke began to rise from Hikari's head.

"Calm repose to the Six Senses[66], the divine monarch's peace comes to my five organs! The origin of peace, shares the root of all gods in heaven and earth! Come, bestow upon me the body and divinity of calm repose — ouch ouch ouch ouch!"

The smoke gradually became thicker and quickly formed the shape of a monkey. Bit by bit, it became solid, turning into a monkey god covered with golden fur!

Standing at a height of 160cm or so, he wore a yellow *Kao*[67] outfit as before.

As the monkey stood up, Hikari simultaneously collapsed on the ground.

"Next, let me put this miko away."

The monkey — the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong who had retrieved his original form, snapped his furry fingers.

Hikari's body turned into a small sphere of light and was swallowed by the Great Sage.

"Hohoho, I didn't really eat her, but simply kept her in my stomach for the time being. Godslayer, if you want to save this miko, just cut open my belly and take her back."

"—What?! I thought you said something about not wanting to be like a villain!"

Godou loudly admonished the Great Sage who was smiling frivolously with his monkey face.

"If you do these kinds of things to girls, what are you but an evil villain?"

"Hahaha, what surprising words. But didn't I already declare yesterday? I am the Great Sage Equaling Heaven who acts with ferocity and exposes evil, except I don't want to feel like I am some sort of petty villain!"

Having spoken, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven renewed his attacks.

So fast! In an instant, he attacked with his palms ten times in succession.

Godou was able to use the [Raptor]'s speed to dodge until the ninth hit, but was struck thereafter.

This was a wild beast he had never encountered previously — with a monkey's agility and attacks that were faster than before.

No, that was not all.

As the Great Sage's palm struck his left shoulder, Godou exclaimed in shock. It was hard!? That's completely like steel! The collar bone was definitely shattered and intense pain invaded the left shoulder.

"Fiery-eyes, golden-gaze, iron skull, iron arms, copper back, copper body."

As he finished reciting, bladed weapons appeared in both hands of the Great Sage. The monkey king then thrust a sword towards his own abdomen.

With a clattering sound the sword shattered. Then he took the blade and chopped horizontally at his neck and the blade broke with a resounding crash.

"I ate heavenly peaches, drank holy alcohol, and consumed elixirs to gain this indestructible body. Furthermore, thanks to the burns from the flames of the Bagua[68] cauldron, I can withstand slashing attacks from swords and blades, splitting attacks from axes, and lightning and thunder attacks without getting hurt."

Could this be immortality — a body of steel!?

Salvatore Doni also possessed such an authority. These immortal constitutions were especially tricky to handle.

At this moment, the sound of gunshot was heard. The signal for temporary retreat. Godou endured the pain in his chest as he raised the [Raptor]'s speed to the maximum.

Will he make it?

The chest pains were signs that the [Raptor]'s time limit was fast approaching.

The divine monkey that should have been shaken off was running in pursuit. Since he had been consciously controlling his speed all this time, Godou felt that he should be able to use his remaining strength to go all out and attain maximum speed. However...

"No way, this is no good. Play with me a little while longer."

Godou received quite a shock.

With movements like a monkey, the Great Sage was running alongside Godou's god speed.

So he really wasn't going at full speed just now!

Charging ahead, the Great Sage accelerated and cut off Godou from the front. With that he made a thrust with the Ruyi Staff, targeting Godou's heart.

Godou gave up on dodging left, right, or retreating. It was already too late.

There was only one course of action to take the least damage from this attack. Continue charging forward! Godou also accelerated his running and took a leap, sending a flying knee towards the Great Sage's face.

Of course, even if the target was hit, it was not going to knock out the opponent. After all, the enemy possessed a body of steel, and it was likely that Godou's own kneecap will be shattered by the impact instead.

Due to the sudden attack, the Great Sage's aim deviated slightly ...

Godou's gamble paid off.

Instead of piercing Godou's heart and killing him immediately, the Ruyi Staff penetrated the flank of Godou's abdomen.

Though injury was inevitable, instant death was avoided.

As the staff was pulled out, Godou collapsed forward onto the ground.

Looks like I've reached my limits. Please, I will rely on you girls for the remainder.

In the instant of Godou's prayer, Lake Chuuzenji's water surface suddenly exploded.

As a mage, Erica was most talented in iron alchemy.

This was battle magic that originated from alchemy, belonging to the magical domain of manipulating metal and infusing magic into objects.

In addition to spells bearing metallic attributes, Erica was also talented in the highly compatible area of fire magic.

Rather than techniques of fire and steel, the witch Liliana's talents concentrated in the areas of potions, communicating with plants and animals, and spells related to water, earth and sky.

Thus when they decided to control massive amounts of water, the main spellcaster was Liliana.

"Behold, I shall send forth a great flood to the earth, extinguishing all terrestrial creatures, wiping all life from the face of the earth."

The knight who was also a witch began chanting the spell words on the shore of Lake Chuuzenji.

"Water, rise from the depths, flooding the earth, submerging all land and mountains."

Erica also stood by her side, silently supporting Liliana as if trying not to disturb her.

"The terrestrial creatures, birds, beasts and livestock, insects that crawl upon the ground, mankind, all shall perish. May death come to all who breathe the air to live, and all who reside upon the land. "

"All the creatures of the surface, humans, beasts, reptiles, flying birds, all shall be exterminated!"

This was the magical ritual, a technique that required multiple spellcasters to cooperate and manifest the same spell.

This was a technique that was used whenever a highly difficult spell that required long casting durations or magical power beyond one person's capacity.

"Behold, I shall destroy them together with the land!"

As the silver-haired maiden yelled out the completed incantation, Lake Chuuzenji's water surface started to form ripples. At first there were only tiny waves that lapped at the shore, but they doubled in strength when rebounding, and this continued repeatedly.

Very soon, towering great waves that seemed like they would smash the shoreline were created as if a typhoon had arrived.

The wrathful waves swept over the northern shore of Lake Chuuzenji and even some of the roads slightly further away. As Godou and the Great Sage Equaling Heaven carried out their high speed battle, Godou finally heard the signal he had been waiting for so long — the sound of the revolver firing.

"Now, Lily! Let's go all out!"

"I do not need you to remind me. Lady of the Lake, please grant your blessing to the witch as your descendant!"

In the instant that Liliana responded to Erica's instructions, the lake surface rose in one rapid motion, and the lake water rushed towards the shore in the form of giant waves.

Along the main streets stretching across the north shore, the rows of shops, hotels, eateries and public facilities were instantly swept away. It was said that legendary surfers rode giant waves roughly 25 feet in height.

Since a foot was about 30cm, that meant 7m or so. However, the current giant waves were humongous walls of water about 15m in height, and they were rushing furiously inland.

That area included the Great Sage who had just pierced a godslayer, as well as the collapsing Kusanagi Godou.

The iron plate slid out from Kusanagi Godou's shirt pocket, exactly as planned beforehand.

Chapter 5 - Suffering of the Ladies, Alliance of Two Kings

Part 1

Gods and Campiones were essentially immune to human magic , but there existed secret ways of circumvention such as working effects through the mouth. The method that Erica and Liliana just used was one of them.

Magically created giant waves were sweeping away the busy streets around Lake Chuuzenji along with the Great Sage Equaling Heaven. If these waves were directly controlled by magic, the attack would have been nullified. Hence that was why Erica and Liliana left the waves to take their course without interference. Instead of specifying a target, they let the indirect effects of their magic engulf the Great Sage. This was one such technique that could bypass magic resistance.

The rest was up to luck, but the effects of the method could be predicted beforehand.

Erica and Liliana almost flew as they ran, westward along Lake Chuuzenji towards the car waiting for them that Annie had prepared.

The mission of rescuing Godou had been entrusted to Cuore di Leone.

Erica's magic sword carried the injured Godou away.

In the instant the giant waves swept over them, Cuore di Leone transformed from a card into a chain with an anchor on one end and attacked the Great Sage like a snake.

Its targets were the Great Sage's ankles, as well as the Ruyi Staff he had just pulled out from Godou's abdomen!

"W-What!?"

The Great Sage was quite surprised. At the instant he successfully delivered a decisive blow to the godslayer, even the monkey king was caught off guard.

At that very instant when Cuore di Leone chained the Great Sage's ankles together, Godou displayed his unrelenting will.

"Aaaaaaaaah!"

Even though his injuries were severe, they were not fatal. He ran at full speed using the [Raptor] while Cuore di Leone continued to entangle the Great Sage who was trying to chase him. The divine monkey anxiously tried to sever the chain, but just as he chopped with his knife hand, the giant waves arrived.

"Ooooooooh!?"

The massive waves devoured the Great Sage Equaling Heaven.

That should buy some time. Godou ran west with godly speed.

There was no need to worry about retrieval because Cuore di Leone was the indestructible magic sword and could be re-summoned by magic.

Thankfully, Godou's godly speed had some remaining stamina and he was able to run at full speed for a good many seconds. His shoulder and the flank of his abdomen hurt immensely, and the heart pain was gradually beginning to intensify.

"Are you all right? Kusanagi Godou!?"

At the meeting point, Liliana was the one who came out to receive him. Ena who had been in charge of firing the signal gun, also arrived with Yuri supported on her arm. Yuri looked completely exhausted, and her consciousness was in a clouded state.

"Your Majesty! Yuri has successfully completed the mission, you must praise her well later."

The Hime-Miko of the Sword reported to the king.

Meanwhile, Erica was staring at the silver SUV with a severe look in her eyes.

"W-What's up? Something happened?"

"Annie-san, who should have arrived first, is not here. Also..."

Hearing Godou's query, Erica gestured to the vehicle.

The seat and door on the driver's side were stained red with blood, and the reddish-black color was smeared over the body of the car.

If all this blood came from one person, he or she must have been critically injured to leave behind such stains.

As Godou noticed the car key that was still in the ignition, his cellphone began to vibrate.

"I-It's my phone, can someone pick it up for me? There seems to be an incoming call."

Godou felt worried by the timing of the call. Since his body had started to paralyze, Godou asked Liliana who was closest to him to pick up the phone.

"It is a text message from Annie Charlton."

The knight showed the cellphone screen to Godou. On it was written the curt message of 'Annie has been hurt in an accident, and I have retrieved her. Do not worry. JS.'

"Though we can speculate all sorts of things from the content of this message, discuss it later. Let's get out of here first and find a place to heal Godou and treat Yuri."

Erica spoke after reading the text message.

I rely on you for now, leaving everything in your hands. You must find a way to escape... Godou communicated with his eyes to the blonde female knight who had guaranteed absolute success for her plan.

"Can anyone drive? By the way, Ena can't."

Placing the exhausted Yuri and Godou on the back seats of the car, Ena asked the rest.

"No one here has reached the legal age for a driving license... Fine, I will think of a solution."

"Wait a minute, you can drive!?"

Seeing Erica make her way into the driver's seat, Liliana questioned as she sat on the passenger seat beside her.

"If you know how to drive, why do you leave things to that maid all the time!? T-Thanks to her, I have had so many near-death experiences!"

Clearly, Liliana had received rides from Arianna before.

Hearing the valid criticisms of her rival and longtime friend, Erica smiled glamorously.

"Oh my, isn't that an exceedingly simple question? First of all, I don't have a driver's license. Furthermore, such a crude means of transport is not fit to be a knight's beloved mount. Finally, today is my first time driving this thing."

After her most intimidating confession, Erica stepped on the gas pedal.

Carrying the group, the silver SUV began to rush forward madly with frightening momentum.

Fortunately, there were no cars in front or moving in the opposite direction. Otherwise, a car crash would likely have resulted.

"Don't worry, I've been watching Arianna and other people drive all the time. Stepping here is the accelerator, that one is for slowing down, and turning this will control the... Yes, I've basically understood it all."

In just a few minutes, the car began to move smoothly and steadily under Erica's driving.

Erica drove with such a graceful posture that one would not have trouble believing she had five years of driving experience. Truly, Erica Blandelli was no ordinary person, to be able to grasp the essentials of driving just by casually observing others without deliberate intent. Absolutely, she was an exceptionally capable and talented girl.

(However, she was clearly unfamiliar with traffic regulations, though it would be unfair to insist on judging her on this requirement.)

With that, the original worries concerning their method of escape were dispelled.

However, a new sense of worry and anxiety surfaced with the pursuer who had appeared.

"Wow... What is going on, this is too unbelievable!"

Turning her head back, Ena could not resist exclaiming.

Chasing the car from behind was a gigantic hand that was connected to a densely fur-covered monkey's arm. Looking back, an enormous version of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven blotted the entire night sky.

'Hahahaha! Godslayer, to think you are over there! Watch me and see how I will prevent your escape!'

A very cheerful-sounding voice came from the sky above.

The voice was no longer Mariya Hikari's, but the same one used by the monkey divine monarch.

Now his title was the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, and the one-of-its-kind divine monkey had blown up in size. Currently, his head was high enough for direct contact with clouds in the night sky, and he extended his massive arm, trying to grab a hold of the car in which everyone was riding.

Erica skillfully swerved the car left and right, evading his efforts to capture them.

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven continued to make attempts again and again. Extending his arm, missing; extending his arm, missing.

However, at last his fingertips touched the rear lights of the vehicle.

The car was sent off course and lost stability, and just as it was about to hit the sidewalk railings, Erica turned the steering wheel to correct the course and finally slammed on the brakes.

The left side of the car had a collision and the impact shook the entire vehicle along with the passengers.

Luckily a serious frontal crash was avoided, but the car continued to spin for a good many revolutions before it finally stopped.

During this time, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven had finally caught up.

After some minor preparations, Annie concealed all traces of herself for the time being.

She watched as Erica, Liliana and Ena left, escorting the two incapacitated members of the team. In order to chase after them, the Great Sage had deliberately transformed himself into a massive form that towered into the clouds.

"Other than being ostentatious, that kind of size offers no actual benefit in real combat... Simply stated, he is a vain god that loves seeking attention."

Discerning the nature of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong, Annie could not help but shrug her shoulders.

She wanted to collect more information first, but the current situation no longer allowed her to do so.

Though her principles were important, it would be placing the cart before the horse if she abandoned those girls to their fate.

"...Birth, death, and the infinite—"

Annie quietly chanted the spell words.

This was the spell for her to summon her outfit and magic gun, thus achieving an instant change of appearance.

Her face became covered by the black mask, along with the characteristic visor that resembled an insect's compound eyes. The black cape fluttered in the wind over the elegant and noble blue-themed outfit.

In the waist holster was a steel-colored large caliber revolver. The feet wore iron-tipped black leather boots.

The devil king who lorded over the darkness of Los Angeles — John Pluto Smith had made his entrance.

In that instant, Annie Charlton's existence vanished. This man was the masked hero, and though he saved the citizens, he was also the tyrant who enslaved them to do his bidding. Without any sense of punctuality, he was a nobleman who loved pretension and acting mysteriously.

Somehow, this had evolved into Annie's second personality. It was completely baffling.

With audible footsteps of leather boots, Smith walked along the scenic roads of the countryside.

His target was neither the Great Sage up in the clouds nor the direction where the car drove off to.

Instead, he approached the central streets of the Chuuzenji hot springs, the area devastated by the tidal wave caused by the Great Knights.

It was now night, and the perfect time most suited to John Pluto Smith. The new moon and the twinkling stars shone in the autumn sky as the curtains of the dark night were lowered. Illumination in the streets came from street lamps and domestic lighting.

"By my name as the king of the underworld I hereby decree. Make offerings to the legs of the beast traversing the dark night. O Light, thou needst only illuminate my path towards conquest!"

Chanting the spell words, Smith activated his authority.

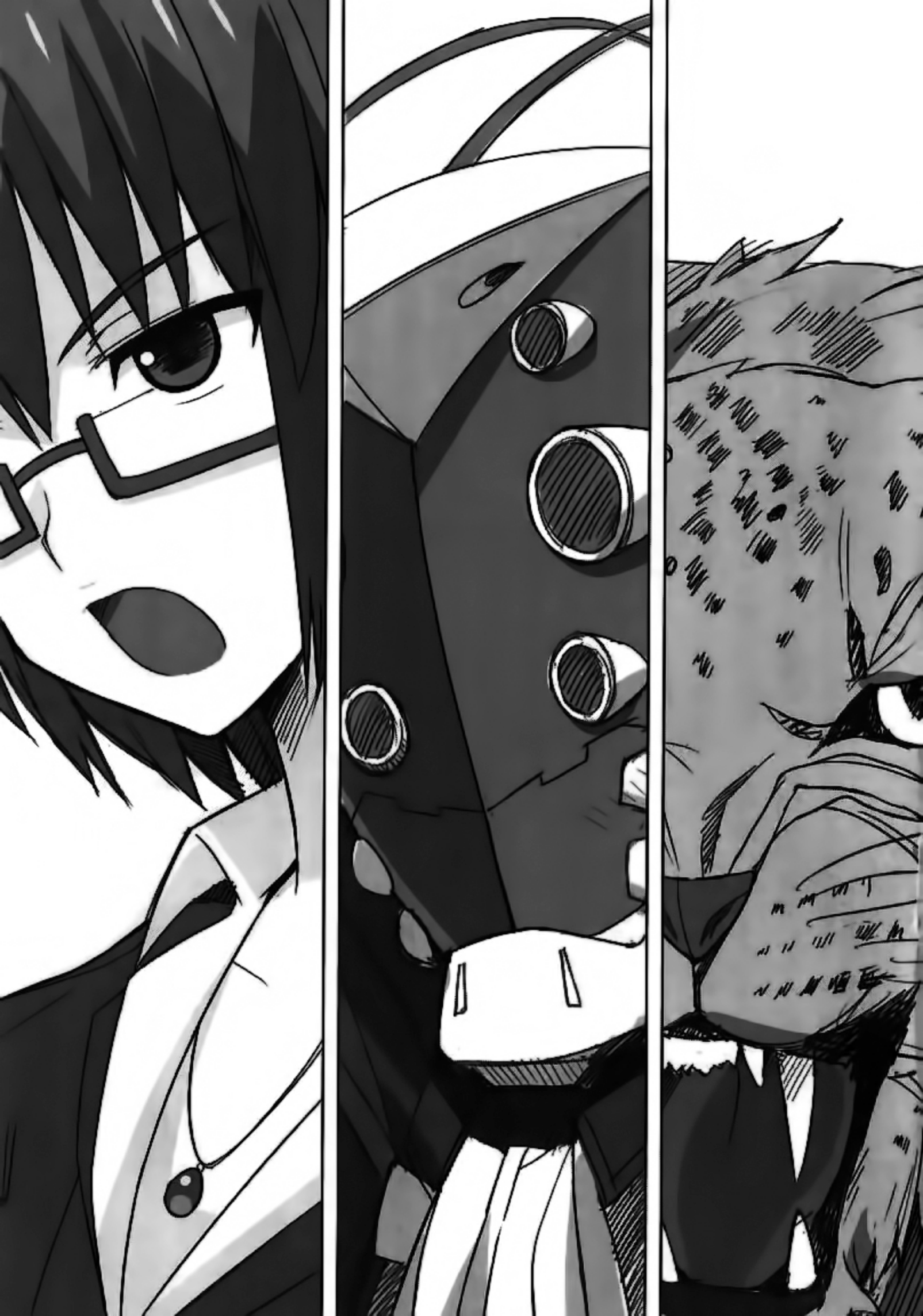
This was the power named [Metamorphosis] by the Witenagemot.

This was the authority that granted the black-clad hero the supernatural ability to transform into other avatars in exchange for various [Sacrifices]. When artificial lighting was sacrificed, Smith transformed into a jaguar!

Smith's body took on form of a jaguar, its entire body covered by yellow fur with brown spots. Its emerald green eyes flashed in the darkness.

It ran. Just as the car took off just then and the Great Sage Equaling Heaven chased after it, the jaguar ran full speed along the asphalt paved road, traversing several hundred miles in just a few dozens of seconds.

This was one of the magical powers possessed by the [Jaguar] transformation.



Luckily it caught up just as the car carrying Godou and the rest was forced to stop, apparently having hit the railing. The Great Sage, whose giant body blocked the view of the sky, also suddenly stopped reaching out with his arm.

He must have noticed. Whenever a devil king approached a god , they instinctively sensed each other's existence.

Their bodies and minds would automatically enter a battle-ready state.

Smith released the jaguar transformation and returned to the black-clad, black-masked appearance.

"To think I would encounter two godslayers here... No, the smell is different from the other fellow. One would never expect a third was hidden here! Hahaha, having no lack of opponents sure will be fun!"

"If you already know it, then shut up with the meaningless chatter."

There was never any need to take the trouble of disguising herself as a man. Originally, it was a deliberate choice to play a different persona.

However, starting at some point in time, her personality automatically shifted as soon as she put on the mask.

"Great Sage Equaling Heaven... All deities who cower secluded in my homeland know of my name. If possible, you would do well to remember the name of John Pluto Smith."

Introducing herself, she pulled out the steel-colored revolver.

Since a new moon had passed after the battle with Asherah, the six bullets had already been replenished.

'Yes, you do possess the power to back up your words. And for that thing to be filled with such a repulsive aura, it is clearly a weapon designed to annihilate my kind.'

After seeing the magic gun, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven commented with great interest.

As expected of a monkey god, his sense of smell was exceptionally sharp. Also, the Great Sage began to shrink his body.

Back to a height of 160cm or so, rather than a monkey, he was more similar to a human covered with dense fur, with the Beijing opera costume and wielding the Ruyi Staff.

Massive creatures lacked agility and so the giant body would have been unable to evade the bullets.

Hence he chose to shrink his size. Anyway, how was the condition of the other Campione? Smith glanced at the back of the car where Kusanagi Godou's body was lying against the seat.

Though his body was clearly powerless to fight, his eyes showed no exhaustion and exhibited the relentless will in his heart . As befitting of a king, he did not despair in such a crisis.

Smith smiled beneath his mask.

With zero immunity against men, Annie Charlton had been deliberately avoiding Godou, but on the other hand, John Pluto Smith did not disapprove of him.

Building romantic relationships with numerous girls and enjoying the pleasure of love.

This was the pastime of libertine intellectuals. Precisely because Annie could not comprehend such a concept, that woman had been plagued with the loneliness of being single!

As he criticized his other personality, Smith noticed something.

The heretic [Steel], the Great Sage Equaling Heaven's divine power was rising rapidly. It was so powerful that it surpassed all the deities he had ever met. What was going on!?

With nervous eyes, Kusanagi Godou watched the divine monkey through an open car window.

"Pardon my impertinence of my request, but I shall handle this. You people should escape first."

"You wish for my lord to owe you a favor? ...John Smith-sama."

As soon as he spoke to the girls, Erica answered from the driver's seat.

As befitting the high class young lady of the Blandelli family, as well as a famous celebrity in the realm of magi, Erica's inquiry carried a very graceful tone.

The reason why she omitted the name of Pluto, was probably because the text message was signed by "JS."

"Favor? No, it is because you all have shown hospitality to my collaborator, which is why I must do something as a thank you gift . In the language of loans, this would be called clearing one's debts. "

The pleasure of trying to decipher each other's motives in this conversation with the beautiful girl proved to be something rarely found in Los Angeles.

If the black mask had the capability to show facial expressions, surely it would be smiling now.

"It is my style to always return good favors, and fortunately I possess an authority that could match the monkey king. So please, leave things to me?"

"Of course, Smith-sama. My lord and I shall return your favor someday. Given the current situation, please allow me to express our gratitude in his stead."

The corner of Erica Blandelli's lips showed a highly refined smile.

Their car started once again, accelerating once then accelerating even further, and soon disappeared out of sight.

'Hohoho, you think you can match me, what audacity! Very well, let Old Sun here show you his divine power, and I shall finish this grand divine summoning spell right now!'

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven snickered to himself as two stone figures suddenly appeared in his hand.

One was an armored soldier with a pig's head, while the other looked like some sort of demonic deity with hair standing on end like flames.

'The treasure mirror reflects the Earth and the Heavens, the divine sword conjoins Yin and Yang! I, Great Sage Equaling Heaven, hereby summon my sworn brothers by our pact of fraternity! Come forth, Middle Bro, Zhu Ganglie!'

As the Great Sage tossed the figure of the armored soldier, it expanded in size and became a [Heretic God].

He had a pig's head covered with dense black fur, and a comedic face despite menacing tusks. The plump and solidly built massive body was wearing black armor.

'Come forth, Lil' Bro Vaisravana!'

This time the figure of the demonic deity that was tossed also manifested into a god, with a head of stiff spiky crimson hair, a face like a ferocious demon, ashen black skin, a dismal gloomy expression, and over his tattered clothing was a set of blue armor.

"Oh well, at least I'm back."

"We meet again, Big Bro, Middle Bro. I suppose our task is to eliminate that fellow before us?'

The two gods descending upon the earth spoke.

Zhu Ganglie — Zhu Bajie. Vaisravana — Sha Wujing. Together with Sun Wukong, this was three against one!

"Let me display the admiral's prowess I have long hidden away. .. The Curtain-Lifting General shall command the great navy, expelling all evil. Let dragons be summoned and rain shall fall!"

Once Vaisravana finished chanting, a pillar of water surged up strongly like a geyser, breaking through the asphalt of the paved road. Rushing towards the sky, its shape began to change, becoming a creature with a long slender body, four short limbs, a reptilian face, and horns on its head.

This appearance was essentially a dragon's.

Vaisravana controlled the dragon born from water.

"I will display my martial prowess as the former general in the royal guard, savor this well!"

Standing upon the head of the water dragon, Vaisravana boasted with pride.

The dragon's appearance with its lowered gaze was most awe-inspiring. It was like a sculpture made of water.

"Wow, Lil' Bro sure looks cool eh."

Zhu Ganglie looked a bit crestfallen.

"I am also known as the Great Patriarch of the Nine Heavens, the Foremost Spiritual Grand Master, Keeper of the Beginning and the Great Void, the Marshal Canopy Divine Monarch! In other words, the Great Emperor's marshal! In the name of my martial might, let the north star be revealed!"

Yelling out a string of pretentious titles, Zhu Ganglie's body turned into a giant.

Expanding until a height of 15m or so, he also became three-headed and six-armed like an Asura.

Basically, additional pig faces grew out on the left and right of his original face while each shoulder gained an extra pair of arms. The six arms wielded a sword, a halberd, an axe, a club, a bow and arrows respectively. The body continued to be clad in pitch black armor.

Zhu Ganglie stepped forward with his bizarre body. Boom! The ground resounded as it shook.

"Hurry and give chase! Make haste and catch up to those fellows just now!"

As the Great Sage gave his orders, two giant apes appeared out of the ground.

These were the giant ape-shaped divine beasts that Godou's group had met on their way through the mountain path. The two divine beasts began to run forward with incredible speed.

Though their bodies looked huge, their speed was extremely fast. Smith wished for good fortune to Godou and his group as he transformed into the [Jaguar] once again. In this short time, he had already metamorphosed quite a number of times.

"In actual fact, I already received news earlier that you can call in reinforcements."

"Oh? What are you trying to say?"

With an impatient tone, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven answered the jaguar's whispers.

"However, why have you waited until now to summon them... This is a very interesting question. The way I see it, you are a very vain deity that loves attention. If you had such a spectacular move available, what would prevent you from showing off right from the start?"

Smith had already deduced a plausible answer beforehand.

If the conjecture was correct, then there was no need to deliberately and recklessly rush headlong into a three-versus-one fight.

The precious arrows of the moon goddess Artemis only had six shots, and now it was necessary to fire one of them... Smith opened the jaguar's mouth and shot a magic bullet!

It was not necessary to fire them from the magic gun when in a metamorphosed state — rather, the causality went the opposite way.

The gun was a weapon created for the purpose of controlling Artemis' authority with a human body.

The flash of white lightning streaked across the sky, resembling a flying dragon. The three gods entered a prepared stance, clearly aware of the power possessed by the moon goddess' arrow. However, Smith's goal was not defeating them.

The magic bullet exploded in the air.

Like a supernova, bright light burst forth from the explosion, illuminating the entire surroundings with a white color.

However, this explosion was neither accompanied by heat nor impact. It was only a flash of light that acted as a visual diversion.

It was the strongest diversion in the world, with the ability to scorch the vision of gods.

But since the enemies were gods, it was possible they might give chase using hearing, smell or extrasensory perception.

Hence, before he began his escape, Smith used the entirety of the [Jaguar]'s magic powers, just in case.

Part 2

Erica floored the gas pedal without hesitation and sped through the night along National Route 120.

She had noticed the two giant apes that were pursuing them and regularly checked the rear view mirror for their position. Though it would take them time to catch up, the distance was gradually shrinking.

Despite their massive bodies over 10m tall, the giant apes ran with incredible speed.

This was surprising to Erica. Generally speaking, most wild beasts were not suited to long distance running because their thick fur prevented them from using sweat effectively to maintain body temperatures. Persisting activity would soon lead to overheating and instant exhaustion.

In terms of stamina, human beings were actually at the pinnacle of all terrestrial mammals.

"Lily, do you think we can shake them off by using flight magic ?"

"Only if they do not know how to fly. It is worth a try, but if that spell is used, we will become defenseless..."

"Then it's better if we don't use it. Yesterday I saw that certain monkey fly like a rocket."

Erica, Liliana and Ena, the three remaining combatants, discussed their options briefly.

"Then that only leaves... Attacking them head on."

Erica murmured as she gripped the steering wheel tightly.

If only they could breach the mountain pass. But attacking them head on was equivalent to suicide.

What they needed was a team of Great Knight-level specialists to fight after making detailed battle plans and preparations, and thus achieve victory... Even then, chances of survival were still quite low. That was the level of power that divine beasts possessed .

"Anyway, let Ena take care of one of them. If I use divine possession, it should be an equal match."

Even though repeated use of that technique carried fatal risk from depletion of spirit powers, the Hime-Miko made the proposal and volunteered with a matter-of-fact tone of voice.

"That is to say, we two are going to face the remaining one? If this was a duel, it would be a taint to our honor."

"However, we are simply driving off monsters, so there is no justification for such rumors. Looking at it another way, for us to obtain victory with our numbers would be a legendary feat."

Erica was unfazed by the silver-haired knight's various concerns.

She continued to accelerate, not to lose the pursuers but to maintain the distance and get ready to mount a frontal assault.

After a while, the car came to a parking lot.

A little further ahead was a passing stream as well as a concrete bridge.

This place was clearly in the mountains, but the presence of restaurants and a bus stop indicated it was some kind of tourist destination.

"This is the Dragon Head Falls. If you go deeper in the mountains from here, you will see the waterfall."

Ena surveyed the surroundings.

They stopped the car in the parking lot. The only ones who got off were Erica, Liliana and Ena.

Yuri was still in a daze while Godou was immobile. Having endured the paralysis of the [Raptor]'s aftereffects and the pain of the pierced abdomen, he slipped into deep sleep.

The two of them were left in the car, but before that, Erica opened the door to the back seat and kissed her exhausted beloved . Though she really did not want this to be a farewell kiss, it could very well be their last. At the same time, she also took the opportunity to apply healing magic.

Unlike the day before, Godou did not have the awareness to complain.

"Hmm..."

As she let go of his lips, Godou moaned.

"Please rest for a while, and I will return to your side as soon as possible. Regarding Ena, you still need to be taught a lesson."

Erica whispered in Godou's ear and left the vehicle after lightly kissing his earlobe. Liliana and Ena both showed an expression that said 'damn it, too late!" but they tried to pretend as if nothing had happened.

As the two giant apes approached with awkward motions, Ena was the first to act.

"Trudging through grassy plains beneath the morning mist, the soles of the feet gradually moistened... Marching through that Nagashino plain, crossing the barrier of the Shirakawa River — Seishuuin Ena has arrived!"

The Hime-Miko of the Sword finished chanting the spell words, and though the portion was small, a divine aura filled her body.

As Ena's guardian deity, Susanoo's divine power was infused into her body. The two giant apes stared at her, clearly judging Ena to be a great threat.

"I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee."[69]

"O sword of Saul, the warrior's weapon fast as an eagle and strong as a lion. Descend into my hand now!"

Chanting their respective incantations, Erica and Liliana finished their spell words of David.[70]

Infusing their beloved swords with spell words, the two swords revealed their true forms, with Cuore di Leone transformed into a broad-bladed longsword while Il Maestro became a glaive. The red and blue bandiera capes also manifested on the two knights.

"Lily, let's divert one of the divine beasts first!"

"Acknowledged! I will attack from above, you go from below!"

Erica approached the closer of the two giant apes and stabbed Cuore di Leone's sharp blade into its ankle. Infused with the spell words of hate and despair, it cut through the fur and hide of the unsuspecting giant monkey.

Blue-colored blood gushed out from the wound.

The giant ape cast a violent gaze towards the interloper at its feet. As if toying with the beast, Erica once again made a thrust, causing even greater injury to the giant ape's foot.

ROOAAARR! The giant ape's eyes went bloodshot, fully intent on taking revenge against Erica.

At this time, Liliana took a leap. Moving as light as a swallow, she deftly landed on the giant ape's knee. Using this foothold for the next jump, Liliana gracefully flew through the air, brandishing Il Maestro as she traveled, embedding the glaive into the left eye of the giant ape.

The eyeball was pierced. GAAAAAAAAH!! The giant ape screamed in agony.

Its remaining eye became clouded with hate and fury.

Erica and Liliana, who had just landed, turned around and began to run. Their first goal was to charge into the nearby forest and begin running away at full speed.

In order to chase the blonde and silver-haired knights, the injured giant ape rushed into the forest.

It felt like someone had applied healing magic, and the sense of pain had lessened greatly.

Finding the stiffness of his body released, the awakened Godou surveyed the interior of the car. Yuri was beside him, leaning

against the car door and making short and rapid breathing noises. The others had left — no, he could spot one of his companions outside the window.

Wielding a Japanese sword, Seishuuin Ena was fighting a giant ape.

As the giant ape attacked with its long and thick arms, Ena rapidly jumped to evade.

The Hime-Miko landed on the giant ape's arm and used the remaining momentum to run upwards along it.

With monkey-like agility, Ena swiftly passed the upper arm and stopped at the giant ape's shoulder. The target of her sword seemed to be the beast's carotid artery in the neck.

At this time, a strong gust of wind suddenly blew from the side, sending Ena flying from the giant ape's shoulder.

This was no accident but holy wind caused by the divine beast's spiritual powers. The Hime-Miko landed with a somersault, but the wind began to howl violently once more, intent on blowing her away.

The wind was strong enough to cause the car's windows to clatter and shake.

"Hearing the noise, catching sight of the waterfall... Like mountain valleys and ocean straits —"

Ena chanted spell words and at the same time, the wind around her seemed to die down.

This was the divine power of Susanoo! Ena's guardian deity was the god of storms, domination and steel — a great and powerful deity possessing many types of divine powers. This time it was Ena's turn to control the wind.

The wind bellowed and became razor-sharp, forming an uncountable number of blades to slice up the giant ape.

The sacred monkey roared in agony. But even though it was injured, none of the wounds were critical.

It was like using a craft knife to victimize a person. As long as critical points were not targeted, a decisive blow could not be dealt . Despite the several dozens of wounds it had received, the giant ape continued to aim its fists at Ena.

By the slimmest of margins, Ena evaded the simple but direct straight punch.

Though the situation currently looked even, the battle definitely favored the side with the overwhelming weight advantage. Ena's movements began to lose agility, and it was clear that massive amounts of her stamina had been depleted from consecutive usage of divine possession!

Wanting to help her, Godou left the vehicle, but his knees gave way and collapsed.

The giant ape exhaled, its breath turning into a blast of compressed air aiming for Ena.

"Aaaaaah!"

Blown mercilessly into the air and slamming into the ground, the Hime-Miko of the Sword screamed in pain.

Unlike her usual cheerfulness, the voice sounded most desperate as Ena tried to use her sword as a crutch, her legs shaking as she attempted to stand up. Watching all this happen, Godou began to notice something.

Verethragna's sixth incarnation, the [Youth] was now available for use.

"W-Why would it suddenly be like this!?"

"That power is for those who fight for you. A power that awakens only in extreme crises."

Yuri suddenly spoke with a weak voice.

Was it another divine oracle from spirit vision? Yuri declared solemnly at the shocked Godou.

"The protection bestowed by the Persian Warlord, has the power to resist death and vanquish evil. Please use it well."

Yuri bowed her head once again and continued to hyperventilate. She clearly had not recovered from the burden of using spirit vision. Anyway, was it all right to leave her like this? Shouldn't someone give her proper treatment?

Godou felt his senses become extremely sharp. Currently, how many people needed [Protection]?

One, two, three, four... So many? In such a short time, everyone was backed into a corner to such an extent?

Godou gazed at the hyperventilating Yuri and watched Ena continuing to fight despite dragging her massively exhausted body . He also became aware of Erica and Liliana who were trapped in a desperate situation out there somewhere.

—Death cannot be allowed to threaten them here.

They were in a most desperate crisis with no salvation in sight. Since the enemies were divine underlings, it would normally be a hopeless situation for the girls. However, Godou felt that he must save them. I will not let you die. My life of battle will not finish in such a place, and I will stay with you all until the bitter end. This was Kusanagi Godou's wish and promise to himself.

Ena fell down a second time and was just about to be crushed beneath the giant ape's foot.

Without hesitation, Godou rushed out, using Verethragna's [Bull] form. Making use of the incarnation that fought strength with

strength, Godou took on the sole of the giant ape's foot with his arms.

"Your Majesty...!?"

"Haaaaaaaaaah!"

Ena looked up as Godou applied monstrous strength, throwing the monkey up in the air with all his might. Suspended in midair, the giant ape showed a dazzled expression.

How should it be taken care of next? Just as Godou pondered, a beam of bright white light flashed past.

Like a shining flying dragon, the light penetrated the giant ape's head and continued onwards as if it still had other prey to chase after in a straight trajectory.

The giant ape's body collapsed like a pile of sand, and the particles scattered in the wind.

Even when Ena used the divine power of Susanoo's [Wind], it was not possible to defeat one of those giant apes in one hit.

Driven by instinct, Godou gazed into the depths of the darkness where the light seemed to have been fired from, and found a jaguar waiting there.

Part 3

The giant ape was unrelenting in chasing after Erica and Liliana .

Despite a height of over 10m and weighing 10 tonnes at least, the giant ape possessed speed and agility rivaling the great knights . They could not shake it off their trail!

In this mixed coniferous and deciduous forest, a battle of despair was taking place.

With one eye destroyed by Liliana, the giant ape drew in a deep breath.

ROAR! Exhaling all at once, the breath became a violent storm that devastated the mountain forest. Leaves and branches were blown away and even entire tree trunks were snapped.

The Great Knights were also blown into the ground. As they crawled back up, the giant ape loomed over them.

Erica and Liliana instantly prepared Cuore di Leone and Il Maestro. Infused with the spell words of David, even gods could be sliced open by these magic swords, but it still left the open problem of delivering the sharp blades to the opponent's critical points. In a fight against divine beasts, would things really go that smoothly?

The giant ape opened its mouth wide. A red fire was lit in the depths of its throat, and intense flames were breathed out.

"Be thou destroyed on the day of my birth!"

"Not once blessed by the Lord, O Light, shinest not upon this land!"

Erica and Liliana used fire-resistant defensive magic.

Since fire and lightning were the easiest natural phenomena to use for direct attacks, there existed a vast array of defensive spells to defend against them, though the flames of gods and dragons could not be completely neutralized.

Even so, the two of them were able to weaken the incoming attack almost by half. In the end, it was time for the Great Knight's capes to prove their worth. These garments, called bandiera, contained protection magic and managed to defend them from the heat of the fire.

However, the giant ape opened its mouth for the third time. After blowing strong wind and intense flames, this time was a red mist! Trees devoured by the mist rapidly withered. It was poisonous!?

Erica and Liliana raised the magical power within their bodies to resist the demonic poison, but their efforts were in vain. The two were struck by an abnormal sense of scorching heat, and their throat and lungs felt as if burning from inside.

The giant ape swung its right arm to follow up. With a loud crash, it descended upon them like a frightening hammer, but Erica and Liliana were too weakened by the poison to evade.

Erica transformed Cuore di Leone into a large rectangular shield, big enough to cover her entire body.

"Mmmm!"

Blocking the giant ape's fist, the great shield was crushed and shattered. As the pieces scattered all over the ground, Erica was sent flying and into a deciduous tree, felling it. Liliana took this opportunity to slice at the giant ape's extended right arm.

Having taken on the form of a glaive, Il Maestro was infused with the spell words of David.

This slashing attack sliced open the giant ape's wrist — the part containing the artery, splashing fresh blue-colored blood everywhere.

ROOOAAARR!!

As if expressing its abundant battle spirit and vitality, the giant ape roared ferociously.

Aiming at Liliana, the beast swung its left arm like a hammer. This was bad!

The blue knight had been greatly weakened by the poisonous mist, and her body was no longer as agile as a flying swallow. However, Liliana reversed Il Maestro and aimed the glaive's sharp blade to stab the giant ape's hand.

Gawaaaaaaaa! The giant ape roared as if it was crying out in pain.

But this was the limit of Liliana's counterattack. The furious giant ape swung its right arm and sent her fairy-like body flying with a punch.

"Mmm... Ah—!"

After rolling many times on the ground, Liliana vomited blood as she struggled to get up.

But she was unable to do so, and the blue bandiera had also vanished. The sacred garment with the blue and black stripes took on part of the damage received by its master, and disappeared.

Erica and Liliana were both heavily injured and unable to continue direct combat.

At this moment, unexpected help arrived. A flash of white light streaked across the sky, piercing the giant ape's temples in a splendid manner like a silver-white dragon.

The troublesome divine beast collapsed like a pile of sand. Who was their savior? Kusanagi Godou's authority was not capable of something like this, so it must be...

Erica pondered as she lay on the ground, unable to move, her mind and body totally exhausted. Her neighbor Liliana appeared to be in the same state.

Ravaged by the poisonous mist, the two of them soon lost consciousness.

The scenery of lush green mountain forest, red leaves, as well as rivers and streams, all seemed to be devoured by darkness.

If one listened closely, the sounds of the forest could be heard, like the motions of branches, the call of insects, and the squirming of unknown creatures. Amongst them, a jaguar was lying in wait.

"Regarding the knights, you have no need to worry. When I struck down the giant ape here, I used the opportunity to snipe the other one that was threatening those girls... Just don't go around accusing me of stealing your kill and it'll be fine."

The jaguar's voice carried a teasing tone to it.

It had the elegant sound of a male tenor's voice.

Godou nodded.

"So, Kusanagi Godou, is there a need for me to re-introduce myself?"

The jaguar turned into a human, a strange person wearing a jet black cape with a black mask.

What ridiculous cosplay... Somehow this thought did not enter Godou's mind. Was it because of the prestige and pressure brought by his true identity? John Pluto Smith was the man whom Godou had heard about many times before.

"No, there is no need... So you have come to Japan."

Was it because the other person's age was unknown? For some unknown reason, Godou didn't feel like talking in respectful tones.

No matter what, the other guy was definitely older than him... Due to living in America (actually his nationality was a mystery), the strange person dressed in black showed no signs of being offended.

"By the way, didn't Charlton tell you guys? I may give off a lazy impression to others, but I'm actually quite hardworking."

The strange man in black laughed, causing the mask to vibrate.

"That's right, is Annie-san safe now? She seemed to be hurt."

"She was injured by the monkeys' attacks, and is seeking refuge to receive treatment. Things have now developed to the final stage — it's time for a full on direct confrontation with the gods. I judged that at this time, the aid of my assistant is no longer required."

The hero of Los Angeles explained as Godou nodded.

"Anyway, let me give you a report of the latest developments. After you lot escaped, I encountered the Great Sage and his two subordinate gods. It was quite a dangerous predicament, but I managed to break through and escape."

Who would have thought that the guy could escape from a three against one situation.

Seeing Godou's eyes of admiration, Smith laughed rather maliciously.

"It was nothing. Having no intention to fight, I simply used magic to conceal myself and focused on running away, that's all."

Smith once again took on the form of a jaguar. Melding its yellow and brown fur into the darkness, it vanished.

As Godou watched in amazement, amidst the many streetlights along the National Route, Smith appeared in his jaguar form out of the shadows cast by those streetlights.

The magical power to move from darkness to darkness, from shadow to shadow. So that's how it was done. This ability was really quite suited for making escapes.

The supernatural jaguar immediately returned to the form of the weirdo dressed in black.

"That said, I also used up one of my trump cards... But since I had no wish for a frontal confrontation with an enemy whose solid defenses are like a steel wall, the trump had to be used."

Impressively, it was apparent that Smith had observed Godou's fight with the Great Sage.

"Those of [Steel]'s kind seem to be afraid of heat and flames hot enough to melt steel. I once heard that from the gods."

"It makes sense. When the time comes, I will need to use a particular move."

"You have a solution?"

"Sort of, but I've heard that you plan on rescuing the girl captured by the Great Sage? If that's the case, that move cannot be used. For you to fight the Great Sage under such a great handicap, do you have any confidence you can win?"

"There are three enemies... I can't handle them all, but I would like to set out a condition."

The insect-like compound eyes on the mask met with Godou's gaze.

"Condition? That's interesting, pray tell me."

"Namely, do not assist me. I have decided to duel the Great Sage one on one. Before everything is settled, can you stand aside? "

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong, had already flaunted his enormous power twice.

Whenever Godou thought about the situation, somehow he really felt like complaining about how ridiculous and unreasonable it was. However, since the opponent was a god, having inexplicable powers was only natural.

"...You have already noticed it. How sharp of you."

Smith's mask vibrated from laughter. Apparently, he too, had noticed the same thing.

Noticing that he was clearly being tested, Godou came to such a conclusion.

"Even though your taste in clothing is very weird, I do believe you are a serious person at heart. But then again, something is still a little off, how should I put it? You have something wrong with your personality, an eccentric."

"Unfortunately, you're a poor judge of character."

Smith deliberately imitated Godou's exasperated tone of voice.

"Wearing appropriate clothing for dramatic situations is called being stylish. I am not some kind of eccentric, but there are principles I cannot compromise. A slightly stubborn man, that's all. "

Godou couldn't help but smile wryly at the pretentious man who could make such complicated justifications with complete fluency. If there was a chance in the future, Godou really wanted to watch his performance on a theater stage.

"Of course, I do have other concerns. Listen carefully, this is what I believe. Possessing great power without a sense of responsibility is just as culpable as committing crimes! With great power comes great responsibility, and with it, noblesse oblige!"

Smith fluttered his cape.

It was truly like a theatrical gesture in the way it prioritized the first impressions of audiences.

"I have already heard from Charlton that your personal life is quite problematic."

"T-That's Annie-san's misunderstanding. It's actually not that serious."

"You don't have to entertain me with excuses. I am a far more open-minded person than that woman. Freedom of love is justice. The important thing is that you don't abandon your responsibilities as a result of pursuing multiple romantic relationships. You have already proven your character when you took initiative in fighting gods on the front lines."

The masked devil king dressed in black was truly a living legend of contrived justifications.

Concluding that this youth lived in a completely separate world , he extended his leather-gloved right hand.

"Kusanagi Godou, as long as the fact of your becoming the ally of John Pluto Smith does not pose a particular hindrance to me, I will accede to your request and simply stand back and observe. Of course, if a suitable opportunity arises for a grand entrance, I reserve the right to make my move!"

Clearly there was no room for objection. Godou also extended his right and shook hands.

Godou was secretly surprised to find the touch of Smith's hand to be softer than he could imagine.

Part 4

Having shaken hands, Godou asked Smith to track down the Great Knights' position using magic.

Smith snapped his fingers.

Despite dampening from the leather glove, the sound was still quite clear. What kind of strange skill was it... Roughly thirty seconds passed, during which Godou pondered this as he waited. With a thud, the sound of something heavy being dropped was heard.

Turning his head back, Godou found Erica and Liliana's bodies lying on the ground.

They were in a delirious state, as if struggling against some kind of illness, and both were hyperventilating.

"I tasked spirits from the Astral Plane to carry them over... They appear to be poisoned. You must reward your lovers well for having fought hard for your sake."

"Of course! ...But they are not my lovers, okay?"

"Nothing less expected of you. That's right, because of unfavorable rumors, other euphemisms must be used normally. You may be young, but what a clever and slippery fellow you are!"

After making this final joke, Smith walked into the darkness, once again turning into a jaguar and disappeared.

What a man with such intense oppressive presence. However, there was no time to dwell on these matters, for Godou still had pressing concerns to attend to.

Before him were the injured Erica Blandelli and Liliana Kranjcar .

Not far away, there was also the exhausted Ena Seishuuin, as well as Yuri who had yet to recover consciousness.

Godou confirmed once again that the [Youth] incarnation could be used.

According to legends, the Persian Warlord Verethragna took on the form of a radiant fifteen-year-old youth when he descended upon the earth as a hero. This incarnation had saved Erica in the past when she collapsed in the Astral Plane, and now it was time to make use of it again.

...But using it meant doing that particular ritual with everyone!

It was truly quite a predicament. But if he didn't do it, he would not be able to save these girls! Godou wished from the bottom of his heart to save them, and was filled with fury at his own ineptitude.

Since things have come to this, who cares anymore! Partially out of reckless abandon, Godou resolved himself to use the [Youth].

Hesitation and fear both vanished.

His mind became as clear and calm as a serene water surface.

Perhaps this feeling was exactly what was meant by the expression 'calm as a lake.' Godou found everything around him had become exceedingly simple to perceive.

Why am I hesitating over pointless things? Didn't I tell myself before? Doubt no further, just go ahead and save everyone.

At this time, Erica pushed to lift her torso. It was an act of such extreme weakness that it did not match the [Diavolo Rosso].

However, this was the result of fighting for Kusanagi Godou.

"...Godou, you're going to use that [Protection] again? And this time on everyone?"

"Yes, because it's necessary."

Despite the weakened state of her body, Erica still put on airs and turned her head with a sulking expression.

"What is it? You look displeased."

"Only I am allowed to do that with Godou... Only my body is allowed to house your power. I have been contemplating this all along, but you are just going ahead and recklessly involving everyone... Furthermore, I... still haven't given you permission to take Ena as your lover."

"I don't need your permission for every single thing I do, right?"

Godou deliberately spoke coldly, causing Erica to turn her face to the other side.

"As Kusanagi Godou's lover and future first lady, as well as the woman who is your knight, it is only natural for me to possess this special privilege. Rather it is you, Godou, who should respect me more."

"Respect?"

"Yes, ever since you became a Campione on the Island of Sardinia, I have been staying by your side. At that time I even opposed the orders of the association. For the sake of your protection, even my purity was offered in a time of need. But Godou has never given me serious consideration, and you keep treating me the same way you treat other girls."

In a rare moment, Erica was complaining with an angry expression.

Acting so gracefully all the time, she must have kept things pent up for a very long time.

Godou smiled wryly slightly, for Erica was currently very adorable. For a girl so talented and refined that it was difficult to think of her as being the same age, one would never expect her to cast aside her usual composure so completely.

To have accumulated so much dissatisfaction without revealing a single sign on her face, she truly was lacking in being upfront.

"Godou, you need to listen to me more seriously — mmm, mmm~~"

Irritated, Godou simply raised Erica's chin and kissed her.

Erica closed her lips and struggled, but not in earnest. After all, she possessed greater arm strength than me. Had she been serious, I would have been pushed away immediately.

Very quickly Erica began to settle down and started to savor Godou's lips as if lusting after them.

"...You really do act differently when using the [Youth], toying with me like this..."

"Not really that different. It's just that I can openly speak out those words I could never say normally."

As Godou whispered into the ear of Erica whose eyes were already intoxicated, he continued with the process.

Godou raised his magical power of a Campione's, refining it into the divine warlord's [Protection].

Through kissing, it was delivered into the body of the girl before his eyes. The [Youth] incarnation offered the ability to bestow [Protection] upon the receiver via mouth-to-mouth, giving them the same relentless vitality of a Campione's as well as granting an explosive increase in magical and spiritual powers.

But in the process of delivering the protection, intense pain would be felt by the receiver. Seeing her suffer so much previously

, this time Godou fed the protection drop by drop to Erica, who moaned "ah..." lightly.

"Besides, you've already vowed before, until the destruction of the world, you will always stay by my side... Then just shut up with the nagging about all these pointless things."

"It's not meaningless. As your number one lover, it is extremely important to me."

Kissing repeatedly, the two whispered quietly.

"Ranking companions is not my style. What's important is everyone does their job no matter what their position, right? However... If you really want it that badly, I don't mind saying it out loud. You are the most precious person to me... That should satisfy you, right?"

"...Now *that* is not Erica Blandelli's style."

Godou kissed Erica's earlobe as he spoke while the beautiful girl , more gorgeous than anyone, answered as she panted.

"After all, you are the one who silently accepted the trump fourth hitter."

"I hope you can address me as queen, and by the way, I don't know terms about any sport as lowly as baseball."

Finally, Erica said something more in tune with her usual style.

"Godou... Try being more forceful. Perhaps because it's the second time, it doesn't hurt as much. I want to receive even more of your power, and I want the deepest part of my body to carry your [Protection] that keeps me safe. So hurry..."

"No, I'm sorry, but this will have to wait."

Godou shook his head at the blonde beauty who pleaded passionately with him. Since Erica had stabilized, he wanted to check out the condition of the other girls, for the two Hime-Miko should be in worse shape than the knights.

"Hmph, come on... Fine, but finish faster and come back to continue, I want every part of my body to communicate with Godou."

After a deep kiss that was like a tight vacuum, Erica finally allowed their bodies to be separated.

Godou once again examined the two Hime-Miko lying together side by side. Due to the extreme exhaustion from divine possession , Ena's breathing was very weak. Yuri's condition was also quite poor. The [Youth]'s power told Godou that forcefully performing spirit vision had greatly strained her mind and brain.

Godou began to use Verethragna's incarnation in earnest. Focusing his attentions, Godou transmuted magical power in his energy center[71] into the [Protection] of salvation.

He first sat down next to the Hime-Miko of the Sword.

"Seishuuin, your body seems to be in a severe condition."

"Yes, right, I'm sorry, Ena cannot help Your Majesty in this state. .."

Ena struggled to respond to Godou's call.

"Don't speak like that, you have already tried your best. This time it is my turn to give you power, but this power does not come without a price. If you — Seishuuin Ena, do not possess the determination to follow me into the deepest abyss of hell, I cannot give it to you."

Godou placed his hand on the shoulder of the raven-haired Hime-Miko.

"Whether alive or dead, or facing any god, I have to come first. You must live for me alone, and I will never abandon you to gods, devils, or fate."

Asking an elite Hime-Miko like Ena to abandon her path and choose me instead was really an unreasonable request.

"If you do that, I can give you the necessary power. How's that? Become my companion."

Swearing a great oath of treasuring for a life time and promising to bring happiness to the other person.

Those were actions for the kind-hearted but otherwise useless people. I am not the same. You shall live for the king and die for the king. Consider it a curse of a life time.

Only those who have accepted such a life are allowed to serve beside the likes of Campiones.

"Yes, Ena swears that whether her sword or her strength, all will be used only for Your Majesty! So please treat Ena the same as Erica, and let Ena be Your Majesty's possession!"

She replied immediately. Seishuuin Ena truly was the girl that Erica saw as her competitor.

As if passionately entreating, Ena embraced Godou tightly.

"I don't mind even if I cannot be your wife or concubine. Just let Ena stay by your side forever, even as a secret woman who cannot be exposed to the public, Ena's family will have no objections..."

"Idiot, don't speak ridiculously like that anymore."

Godou spoke as he glanced at Erica.

The self-styled first lady candidate made a look that seemed to say 'do as you please' and shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't like to rank my companions, so you are not allowed to say that 'being an underground lover is fine' or anything like that."

"Yes, got it, Ena understands, Your Majesty — Mmmm..."

The chatting could not continue, for Godou had forcefully sealed Ena's lips.

The bold, unrestrained and genuine girl rolled her eyes as she accepted the forceful kiss. Like Yuri, she seemed to be completely unexperienced in this area.

Godou extended his tongue into her mouth. The initial touch seemed to cause her great surprise, stiffening her body, but Godou disregarded it and continued his assault.

Flipping her tongue, licking her teeth, pressing his lips down upon hers.

Thus the wizardry channel between him and Ena was established — the path for transmitting [Protection] was complete.

"Ah, aaaaah~~"

"Seishuuin? Does it hurt a lot? Should I go a little gentler?"

"I-It's fine... I can bear it, b-but I am a bit scared..."

Ena opened her lips as she described how she felt, surprising Godou by inserting her tongue into his mouth.

Extremely soft, without any hard parts to it, the tongue ventured into Godou's mouth in trepidation. Godou attacked in return, pinning down her tongue, entangling together and intimately became one.

"Though it's scary, Ena will definitely bear it. Please treat Ena the way you like! Now that Ena is also Your Majesty's woman... I will properly do my duty...!"

Hugging tightly and passionately kissing nonstop, Ena was very inviting of tender affection. At the same time, the desire to trample and ravish her was rising.

Godou began to send a little bit of Verethragna's [Protection] into Ena's energy center beneath the navel.

"Ah... Ah~~!?"

From Ena's mouth came brief moans as she separated from Godou's lips.

However, after a brief respite of ten-odd seconds, the Hime-Miko of the Sword once again sought the kiss of her master.

"S-so with this, Ena has become Your Majesty's woman, right? I won't lose to Erica-san or Liliana-san... Or even Yuri... As an acceptable lover... Right!? More... Let Ena feel even more of Your Majesty's power!"

Ena sucked Godou's mouth, continuously with passion and power.

Godou generously accepted her bravery and willfulness. Ena, who usually did as she pleased, was consciously trying to be brave . Though a little odd, it made her especially adorable.

"From Your Majesty's body I can feel Ama no Murakumo, so it really lies dormant within you. Hoho, Ama no Murakumo had been anxious because you wouldn't use it... By the way, Ena is already much better, Your Majesty should take care of Yuri now... Please..."

"Even if you didn't remind me, I was going to do that."

As Godou finished, Ena immediately reached out to her Hime-Miko friend lying beside them, placing her hand over the hand of Yuri, who had been hurt from using spirit vision forcefully .

Yuri had yet to awaken and her consciousness was fuzzy.

Trembling, Ena was barely able to support herself and took her childhood friend in her arms.

"Your Majesty... Hurry and... for her..."

Embracing Yuri from behind, Ena urged quietly. The two beautiful Hime-Miko sat there side by side.

Yuri had already sworn eternal allegiance to Godou, so there was no need to force her to make a new oath. Godou casually drew near her face and stole the lips of the unconscious Yuri.

As he poured slightly stronger [Protection] in her, Yuri's body began to lean back a bit.

"G-Godou-san? And why is Ena-san here as well?"

She seemed to have recovered consciousness. From her lips came a query as well as heavy panting.

Once again, Godou sealed her lips with his own and whispered to her quietly.

"I will make you mine, do you still object?"

"Yuri, let's all become His Majesty's women. Though it hurts a bit, bear it for a little while."

"Yes, very well... I-I have made my decision, please do as you wish, Godou-san."

Before Godou, Yuri liberated her fiery-hot body.

Supported by Ena, the quintessential Yamato Nadeshiko leaned her maiden body against him.

"Mariya, how do you feel now? Does it hurt?"

Kissing her repeatedly, their tongues tangled and they exchanged saliva.

Yuri was still a bit clumsy the first time, but now she seemed to have fully accustomed herself to it.

Although she was not as bold as Erica, Yuri responded to Godou's actions whole-heartedly, catering to him with genuine sincerity. The wizardry channel began to connect between them.

It's about time? Godou refined magical power into [Protection] and forced it deeply into the furthest reaches of Yuri's body.

"——!?"

Locked mouth-to-mouth with Godou, Yuri's body began to tremble.

"Should I go a little less forcefully?"

It should be hurting a lot, but the beautiful Hime-Miko shook her head.

"No, there is no need, pain is fine... I will endure, so please bestow your divine power unto me, and use my body to receive your power."

Yuri's gaze moistened, and she kissed Godou's lips as if trying to envelope them entirely.

The intimate sense of contact between mucous membranes was frighteningly bewitching, making Godou more and more aroused.

"M-My consciousness has now become lucid... It is all thanks to your protection. Please, give me more —"

Holding back tears as she endured the pain, Yuri pleaded courageously.

The resolute maiden was too adorable, and Godou shifted his lips to kiss her cheek.

"Y-Your Majesty... Please also give Ena... I beg you... Ena will always stay with Your Majesty from now on. So please..."

Ena forcefully pressed her lips onto Godou's.

What a clumsy manner of courtship. Though she was a naturally bold girl, it seemed like she was even more awkward than Yuri in this regard.

But this clumsy behavior was very inviting, and Godou once again poured [Protection] into her.

"...Ooh?"

Ena moaned. It does hurt very much after all?

"P-Please endure, Ena-san... I will accompany you."

Ena opened her eyes wide in pain while Yuri held Ena in her arms, supporting her.

"Y-Yes, w-we two will become His Majesty's women... Ah, E-Ena gets it now, I am intimately connecting with Your Majesty's innermost depths, as well as — Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi... Your Majesty... Ama no Murakumo is telling me, what kind of god the Great Sage Equaling Heaven is. It is now time to reveal his true nature."

Tears streamed out of Ena's eyes as she spoke to Godou.

"The divine clan of heretical steel originated as outsiders, and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi is one of them. Ena will transfer as

much as possible all sorts of information known about the Great Sage. Yuri, let us tell His Majesty together, for the sake of our husband, let us offer the spell words to slice gods apart!"

"Very well, let us both become Godou-san's power... To become the blade of his sword..."

The two Hime-Miko drew their lips near, and Godou welcomed them.

Repeatedly swapping between Yuri and Ena in turn, the lips of the three melded together as if they had become a single being.

"The Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong was born from stone as the divine monkey. The stone mentioned here is essentially ore."

"Havoc in the celestial palace — the Great Sage caused a ruckus in the palace of heaven, and was caught by the True Lord Erlang, embodiment of the sacred, who then tossed him alive into the Bagua cauldron."

"Scorched and burned for forty-nine days in the fiery cauldron, the Great Sage did not die, however, but was reborn instead."

"As one born from iron ore, the hero was scorched, tormented, annealed, and made complete. This legend stands as proof of the Great Sage's identity as a sword god of [Steel]."

"The *Journey to the West* passed down to contemporary times has its basis in the Ming[72] dynasty novel, but the original legends

came from various tribes in ancient China scattered all over the continent."

Was Godou's tongue currently tangling with Yuri's or Ena's? It was already impossible to tell, for the three of them had lost all sense of boundary as they sought one another.

Godou tasted Yuri's lips as he greedily sought Ena's, while the two girls simultaneously searched for Godou's tongue and began to suction. Lips crossing, Yuri and Ena swallowed Godou's saliva in small gulps.

"No fair, only caring for Yuri and Ena... Casting me aside."

Complaining, Erica hugged Godou from behind.

Godou felt the bountiful bosom pressing tightly against his back , strongly making its existence known.

Turning his head back, Erica's passionate kiss awaited him.

It was an intense kiss that felt as if it would suck out everything from his mouth.

The lustful and extravagant exchange could no longer be adequately described by the term 'kiss.'

"Godou... It's about time, right? Send forth your protection to the very end, I am ready to accept it any time, don't make me wait with such impatience..."

"I-It's too unfair if it's only Erica-san, Ena and Yuri are ready too ."

"Godou-san... Please spoil us with your love..."

As the three girls pressed their lips against him, Godou responded to their requests.

Increasing Verethragna's [Protection] to distribute between everyone in one go, the divine warlord's authority penetrated into the girls' bodies simultaneously.

"Ah, aaaaaaah, Godou-san!"

"Y-Your Majesty... Ena is now... Truly Your Majesty's woman...!"

"P-Pour your power into my body once again... Don't worry, it doesn't hurt as much as before. So please... let me feel even more of your power... I beg you!"

The three maidens — [Protection] was sent into each of them at their energy centers beneath the navel.

Godou nodded at the feeling when he was reminded of the remaining girl.

"E-Erica... Mariya Yuri... Seishuuin Ena... How could you all be so bold... Engaging in this indecent behavior!? A-As a knight I cannot accept this..."

Liliana had recovered consciousness and seemed to have noticed the ritual in progress.

With a shocked expression she stared at what Godou and the rest were doing.

Perhaps due to the poison's effect, she could only support her upper torso, and her gaze and tone of voice were very weak. Godou extended his hand towards the silver-haired knight in this state.

"Liliana once vowed to be my exclusive knight, like birds flying wing to wing, or intertwined branches? So come on over here and I will reward you as appropriate."

"A-As appropriate means!?"

"With victory and power... I cannot give you things like the happiness or memories of ordinary people. However, as long as you follow me, you will surely obtain victory, so I will give you the necessary power. I will even give you my heart."

Godou swept his gaze over the girls leaning their bodies against him, offering their all.

Everyone showed a serene smile, while the particularly contented Erica signaled with her eyes.

"Oh well, this might be a good thing after all, let's get married like this when the time comes."

"B-But I am a knight... If I lose myself to lust like Erica... In order to manage your female relationships properly, I cannot let myself fall to such narrow-minded behavior."

"Lily, don't be overly obsessed with things like identity."

Seeing Liliana pointlessly hesitating, Erica spoke with her eyes half closed.

It was meant to help her longtime friend overcome her rigidity.

"You want to be the best knight, right? Then you should accept the ritual together with us. What Kusanagi Godou needs right now are fearless warriors. Are you going to lose to me, Ena and Yuri? If that's the case, are you still going to insist you are the premier knight?"

"Idiot! I am not going to lose to anyone!"

Liliana declared with a solemn expression.

"Even if my lord sets off for hell, I will follow to the very end. Do not look down on me!"

"If that's the case, hurry and get yourself over here. Worry about the details later."

Admonished by Godou, Liliana finally moved over, but it seemed like she still had not steeled her determination and she stopped a step or two away.

The one who pulled the blue knight over was Ena.

"Liliana-san that's no good, if His Majesty said you must come here then you should accept his love openly."

"Ena-san, please do not force her, you need to respect people's wishes in these matters... But Liliana-san, let me state that the others and I do not regret engaging in this behavior."

Even Yuri was persuading in an inoffensive manner, bearing a smile radiant as a blooming sakura flower.

"P-Please wait a moment. I still have not prepared myself — Mmm~~!?"

Because Liliana still could not make up her mind, Godou silenced her with a kiss.

"From now on it might be quite arduous, you would do best to prepare yourself."

The silver-haired maiden was afraid for an instant, but nodded after swallowing.

Godou distilled the [Protection] within him, and sent it gradually into Liliana's body.

"Mmm... Aaaaaah!"

The beautiful fairy-like face was distorted by pain as Liliana screamed out acutely.

Through their lips, Godou slowly delivered [Protection] into her body.

"Y-Your overwhelming power is certainly being transferred, b-but why does the rhythm feel a bit different from when the others were receiving it?"

"Idiot, if I start with pouring that amount of power, it will be very painful for you. Didn't you see how everyone else was suffering?"

"D-Do not mind me, Kusanagi Godou. Please treat this as a test of my loyalty, pay me no mind! As the premier knight I cannot lose to anyone here..."

Perhaps due to bearing the intense pain, Liliana cried out with her eyes closed.

For an instant, Godou shifted his gaze away from the blue knight and met with Erica's. I could do as she says, but she will be in great pain, oh? Well, she's not a girl you can convince with words alone though — with no other way, Godou accelerated the delivery of [Protection] into Liliana's energy center.

"Mmmm... Ah, aaaah~~!"

Liliana almost fainted from the pain and she separated her lips from Godou's mouth.

"See, didn't I say just now, it's best to start slow. You don't need to rush — Hmm!?"

Godou's mouth was suddenly stifled, for Liliana had stolen his lips with a kiss.

Pecking away at Godou's lips, her kiss felt as soft as an angel's feathers.

"I-It is fine, I am your knight... Enduring this kind of pain is expression of my loyalty to my lord, it is my honor."

Liliana murmured lightly as she panted heavily.

"I, Liliana Kranjcar, would suffer the shame of a lifetime if you had to worry about me specifically when lined up against Erica and other women. So I implore you, do not give me special consideration — I will surely bear it!"

However, reality was not that easy.

Hoho... Just as Godou wondered how to respond, Erica smiled. Compared to her usual diabolical smile, this one carried a greater sense of innocence, making it more of an impish smile.

"In that case, Godou, you should treat Lily and me the same as what you did with Yuri and Ena, and give us some good loving."

Erica poked her head in between Godou and Liliana and offered her lips. Compared to just now, it felt much softer, and Erica's kiss was like a gentle caress on Godou's lips.

"You're joining in as well? Is this something that needs to be done with two people?"

"Of course, you can do it, right? Didn't you say that you hate ranking us? So you must love us fairly and take care of us equally."

Godou immediately figured out what she was scheming impishly.

Grabbing Liliana's shoulder, he pulled her over, lining up before him the Eastern European beauty who was like a fairy, side by side with the impish beauty. At this moment, Ena interrupted:

"In that case, you can't ignore us either. Yuri, come over here as well."

"E-Ena-san! Stop dragging me...! ...Really, everyone is too shameless, over indulging in this kind of behavior is not proper..."

Ena embraced Godou, and somehow, Yuri had also begun hugging him at the urging of her childhood friend. The Yamato Nadeshiko-like Hime-Miko who was usually consumed with prudent forethought, was now gazing at Godou with an intoxicated and seductive expression, despite admonishing the others.

Godou drew his face near the four maidens, and stole away their lips in turn.

Kissing Erica, kissing Liliana's lips, and also catering to Yuri and Ena at the same time.

With the silver-haired knight at the center, Godou passionately kissed the other three girls one after another in turn, distributing [Protection] amongst them evenly.

"Ah... Kusanagi Godou, if someone were to witness this scene, then... It would be most troubling — as a knight, for me to indulge in such scandalous behavior — !"

"Unfortunately, your king is the kind of man who does this sort of thing."

Godou suddenly let go of the panting Liliana.

"Do you all regret swearing an oath to a man like me?"

"Hoho, I will serve by your side, and be your sword and shield throughout your path of conquest. And then I shall be your right hand and trusted advisor, assisting you as you lord over the earth. It is completely unnecessary to confirm this sort of thing with me, Erica Blandelli."

"Same for Ena. It is because Your Majesty is this kind of person that Ena feels her heart pounding every time."

"No matter what kind of great sinner you might become in the future, I will always stand by your side..."

Erica spoke nonchalantly, while Ena declared joyfully and Yuri smiled gently with kindness. And then, Liliana finally confessed her innermost feelings with honesty.

"I-I am the same! Kusanagi Godou! We are entwined branches and birds flying wing to wing. If you ever retire from the fate of godslaying, then I will accompany you in your chambers, and do everything in my power to serve my king. As long as it is your wish, no matter how shameless or immoral, I will still —"

The current Liliana was no longer the awe-inspiring and righteous knight, nor the slightly out-of-line domestic girl. At some point, her face started to show an expression of a woman with fairy-like beauty and a seductive charm of fantasy.

"Though as a knight, this is troubling... But on a personal level, I-I really like you like this, so I will no longer find myself at a loss over unnecessary things —"

What followed after this was a chaotic scene.

As the four of them offered their lips to him in a row, Godou savored and enjoyed them fully, in no particular order.

They could no longer tell whose lips belonged to whom, or whose tongue was being entangled. As they licked one another's saliva without conscious identity, the five of them ended the ritual, and the divine warlord's protection was bestowed upon the girls.

Chapter 6 - God and Godslayer, Intense Showdown Between Two Heroes

Part 1

A few hours passed after the godslayers had fled.

Though it was late at night, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong, was far from sleeping.

"Damn it, Old Sun here was looking for a good fight and all they did was run away. What cruel and inconsiderate fellows!"

Summoning his golden cloud, he flew to the peak of Nantaisan.

He grumbled as he overlooked the darkness beneath. Due to the depletion of divine power, Zhu Ganglie and Vaisravana were no more, having returned to their figurine state.

"In that case, to prevent those fellows from fleeing the next battle, I'd better lay down a proper trap... Bait them, surround them, and beat them up to my heart's content..."

The Great Sage sat cross-legged on his cloud and began to mutter.

"Showing them my divine might is really the most effective method. That godslayer brat seems to be rather obsessed with the girl in my belly... He will definitely show up on his own volition. As for that fellow dressed in black, it'd be great if he came, if not then I'll just lure him some other way."

Despite pondering for a great while, in the end all he reached was a half-assed conclusion.

The divine monkey was the world's strongest ruffian, but also a god of battle foreign to the concept of advance planning.

"Hohoho, this vast land is already my territory, and it'd be nice to further extend its boundaries."

Muttering to himself, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven pulled out a handful of hairs from his fur.

Chewing them a few times in his mouth, he blew them away. Repeating this process dozens of times, tens, hundreds, thousands of strands of fur were scattered in the wind.

"Innocence. Supreme success / Perseverance furthers. If someone is not as he should be / He has misfortune / And it does not further him / To undertake anything. Under heaven thunder rolls: All things attain the natural state of innocence. Thus the kings of old / Rich in virtue, and in harmony with the time / Fostered and nourished all beings."[73]

Chanting the spell words, the Great Sage distributed his divine power to the doppelgängers.

Then let's wait for these mechanisms to spread over the vast land. Other than extending the territory, they could also display the monkey king's divine might to those Campiones, and be used as a signal for battle.

Let's sit back and wait for the prey to show itself. Even though he did not feel sleepy in the slightest, the Great Sage went to sleep anyway on his cloud, twisting and turning.

Meanwhile, Toushouguu had been turned into a stone prison as the result of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven's divine power.

In order to handle the crisis of the imprisoned demonic cult leader, there were still people at work even though it was late at night.

The personnel responsible for sealing off the area were members of mobile armed forces, police-related people, spellcasters trying to reverse the cataclysm through magical means , as well as History Compilation Committee members...

Their base of operations was a tent put up temporarily on the main visiting path to Toushouguu. Currently, three prominent members of the handling committee were gathered here.

"Ah~~! Every time I am reminded of Master's imprisonment within the stone, I feel like my body and soul are completely frozen! Dear heavens, if only this unworthy disciple, Lu Yinghua, could suffer hardship in Master's stead! Etc etc... Now it's my turn, flip over and reveal all the cards! I will use the combo of [This is that person's home!] followed by [I won't accept him having that kind of wife!]'"

The former half of this speech was yelled out loudly, while the latter was spoken softly enough to be heard only by people next to the speaker.

Lu Yinghua was the one speaking, putting on a one-man-show as he operated a handheld gaming device with a touchpen.

"I'm not going to take that move head on. Activating the [You temptress, don't go near him anymore!] defense... By the way, Mr. Lu, what is the point of your little skit?"

Similarly, Sayanomiya Kaoru also spoke as she played on her handheld.

Though it was already 4am in the morning, the attention she paid to her appearance was impeccable, dressed in a refreshing suit jacket and a white open-collared dress shirt, as well as cotton trousers (all in men's style, of course).

"Of course there's a point. Master's personality is far from ordinary... Even if she is trapped in the stone prison, it would not be surprising for her to be listening to sounds outside using supernatural hearing. This is an important part of establishing proof of presence."

"The fact that she has a personality that makes one suspect such possibilities, is truly the most terrifying thing about her..."

Amakasu commented on Lu Yinghua's answer.

He was still dressed in his usual suit, except this time he wore a sweater and a thick cotton-padded jacket inside, as well as a surgical mask and a full array of equipment to keep warm and resist the flu.

"*Spurt*(the sound of blowing one's nose). Even if the situation evolves into one of those thirteen-man teams in student council battle manga, it would not be surprising... It's my turn, let me activate this interference magic, [Police Intervenes: Level 3]!"

"Wow... This will cut down to one third the power gauge of all cards with the stalker attribute!?"

"As a result of this effect, Mr. Lu's cards have all turned into fodder, and the only opponent remaining is Kaoru-san..."

"Oh my! Amakasu-san, I hold in my hand the card that makes all others commit suicide, the [No Longer Human]... Wouldn't you believe it?"

"Who knows? Kaoru-san has already used that card twice. Bold as you are, I don't think you'd use that kind of double-edged card in a hat-trick... Cough cough!"

"Hohoho, I will feel troubled if you underestimate me too much. .. I shall now use [My Womb Bears That Man's Child!] to start an assault on Mr. Lu."

"Targeting me!? Don't look down on me! I sacrifice all the stalkers and summon [Misery]!"

The three of them were networking their handhelds to engage in a three-way battle.

As the battle (also known as killing time) gradually reached a climax, there were also others hard at work.

"Hmm... No good... Ordinary Daoist arts cannot counter this petrification!"

"Oh no~~ Will Her Eminence be buried alive forever!?"

These voices were quite unclear, and had very distinctive accents.

Lu Yinghua had summoned subordinates of the Lu family from places like Yokohama, Shinjuku, Ikebukuro and Akihabara, who were now carrying out rescue operations.

Amongst them, there were seven or eight male experts in Daoist arts.

"To be honest, the Committee does not actually allow foreign unaffiliated personnel to enter its territory —"

"That's okay, consider it a favor I owe you now."

"If the young master of Hong Kong's Lu family says so, then that would be for the best. However, what kind of practical progress do you expect? I think this is just a waste of effort."

"Took you long enough to say something like that. It is not only a waste of effort, but completely meaningless. Although from the perspective of human Daoist arts, the spell can be categorized as a type of Qimen-Dunjia[74], it is cast by a deity after all. Of course it's impossible for my bros to neutralize it. I never had any expectations in the first place."

"Wow... You are clearly the leader and yet you speak like this?"

"Because he knew it wouldn't work from the very start. It does allow our Committee members to handle all matters unrelated to

the rescue attempts, so there is nothing to complain about. However, pure numbers in personnel is meaningless in resolving the current incident..."

Due to the uneasiness in her heart, Kaoru stopped moving the touchpen in her hand.

Amongst the Hime-Miko, Mariya Yuri had the best spirit vision, but in actual fact, Sayanomiya Kaoru also possessed the same ability. Though her proficiency was inferior to Mariya Yuri, it was still at a substantial level.

"Cough cough, Kaoru-san, what is it?"

"I had a very unpleasant premonition, as if something bad was about to happen."

"Then we can't ignore it. Just to be safe, we'd better make preparations, cough cough."

Amakasu took out a small knife and began carving Chinese characters into the petrified ground.

Immediately, Kaoru sensed a massive amount of magical power flowing.

Like some kind of terrifying but minuscule object was drifting here, carried by the wind and infused with something like divine power, and that the surroundings were undergoing change.

The Daoist experts of the Lu family, as well as the policemen on night watch, had all transformed into monkeys!

Japanese monkeys, gibbons, chimpanzees, orangutans, etc... All sorts of primates. Their nails and fangs were exceptionally long while their bodies were frighteningly large, and they looked especially vicious.

As soon as they caught sight of the two Committee members and the famed young master of Hong Kong's Lu family, the monkeys became full of murderous intent!

In the instant that they pounced ferociously —

"By the name of the Mysterious Lady of the Nine Heavens, obey my commands in haste!"

Amakasu recited the mantra.

The characters of "Changes of the Six Yin"[75] carved in the ground began to release magical power.

Striking the ground with his hand, the petrified surface peeled off and could be flipped like a sheet of fabric and used to cover the three of them like a curtain.

Their figures vanished in an instant. Or rather, they appeared to have vanished.

"Cough cough! This is also a type of Qimen-Dunjia... I'm only good at these kinds of little tricks."

"Not at all, it is very effective as always."

Kaoru praised her subordinate's quick act of merit.

Unable to find the three of them, the monkeys began looking all around in the surroundings, sniffing for smells, trying to track them down, even though their quarries were right under their noses.

Qimen-Dunjia — ninjutsu was a type of wizardry that came to Japan from China.

It offered the capability to hide, disappear and reappear far away in an instant, and also had spells in Fire, Water, Earth and other variants. For a ninja descendant like Amakasu, these were family secrets passed down the ages.

"The empty wind beneath the moonlit snowing sky, mayst thou blow apart the path of the heavenly clouds... Reluctant to let the goddess return, hoping to keep her beauty on this earth!"

While protected by the concealing arts, Kaoru used an investigative spell.

Amplifying her vision, Kaoru surveyed the city of Nikkou from above as if using a telescope.

The quiet little town should not have many pedestrians at such early hours before dawn. However, the silhouettes of creatures could be seen, slowly coming out of the people's homes in the dead of the night.

Either opening windows with great dexterity or violently smashing the glass, these creatures coming out were all monkeys.

If theories were correct, they were all humans who had been turned into monkeys by the Great Sage Equaling Heaven.

This was the darkest hour before the arrival of daybreak...

In this deep, deep darkness, strange demonic monkeys were roaming everywhere. It was a comedic yet terrifying scene to behold.

Kaoru continued scouting from above.

From a cursory glance, the city streets nearby all seemed to have fallen under the control of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven. Proceeding to observe from above, there was the region along the Toubu Nikkou Line whose railway ran along the Daiyagawa river, containing parks with golf courses and bountiful green fields, the cedar forest planted by Tokugawa Ieyasu's retainer Matsudaira Nobutsuna which extended all the way to the old city streets of Nikkou, and finally the train stations of Kami-Imaichi and Shimo-Imaichi —

"...Looks like the area under the effects of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven consists of the surroundings of JR and Nikkou's Toubu Line. The vicinity of Imaichi does not have any strange happenings for now, though it may just be a matter of time."

Kaoru ended the spell and reported her observations to the other two people.

Currently, the personnel who had entered Nikkou numbered around thirty or so, consisting of History Compilation Committee members, related organizations and some sent by the local police. The reason why so few had been gathered was likely because they were afraid the current situation would arise.

Conversely, none of these specially selected agents were transformed into monkeys. Like Kaoru's trusted subordinate Amakasu Touma, they took effective action as their own independent judgment dictated.

However, even concentrating these people's powers together, it was still futile in the face of a god.

"Things should be fine before dawn but there will be a problem if resolution is delayed further. By the way, countering these transformations will probably take a lot of labor."

"Really, then we should start our preparations?"

The one and only trump card was, of course, Kusanagi Godou — the Devil King Campione.

Kaoru possessed the virtues of always using the best person for the job and never spending unnecessary effort. As she briefly responded to her subordinate's suggestion, Lu Yinghua seemed to be listening intently to some kind of noise.

"Mr. Lu, did you hear something?"

"...I knew it would happen sooner or later, but she finally succeeded. Can you two not hear it? The sound of stones shattering... Crushed, broken, pulverized by brute force."

The two History Compilation Committee members looked at each other after hearing Lu Yinghua's low whispers. Neither of them could hear the sound but it was likely that the demonic cult leader's direct disciple possessed sharp senses that rivaled Seishuuin Ena.

All in all, the incident was most likely heading towards climax.

Part 2

As dawn drew near, Godou was woken up by Sayanomiya Kaoru's phone call.

'Just as I mentioned, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven has finally become a threat to the human world. There is also an interesting occurrence mentioned by Mr. Lu that I would like to tell you as well.'

Despite the obvious urgency of the situation, she gave her report in a very calm voice.

'Then let's leave it at that, since we have to begin operations on our side. Let's talk again later.'

"Ah... Sayanomiya-san, you don't have any other questions for me?"

Godou inquired because he expected to be asked questions along the lines of 'Can the Great Sage really be defeated?' or 'What should we do?'

'It's fine if you just call me Kaoru. It's me who entrusted you with great responsibilities, Godou-san, so there is no point in being impatient at this juncture. I think you already realize the urgency of the situation, so undue haste would be meaningless.'

Kaoru did not mind a familiar manner of addressing her.

During times of crisis, it was not an easy thing to entrust everything to someone reliable and then sit back and wait for the result. Sayanomiya Kaoru had a much bolder personality than what the delicate beauty of her appearance might suggest.

'Right, by the way, I expect Godou-san will one day ask me what sort of conspiracy I am harboring. How I look forward to that . Anyway, that's it for now, let's hope we will meet again, safe and sound.'

Leaving behind these cryptic words, she hung up the phone.

It was finally time for a decisive battle. Godou surveyed the surroundings. His female companions had all awakened, and they were now in a hotel lobby.

A few hours ago, they had escaped from the divine beasts and reached a hotel near the Dragon Head Falls.

The staff and guests all seemed to have turned into monkeys and left, so there were no others present. As soon as they set up a magical barrier as a precaution, they decided to rest and recuperate their energy in preparation for the upcoming decisive battle.

After having some food and a bath, they moved some beds into the lobby.

In order to avoid a surprise attack, the entire group slept together. In the end they were only able to catch a few hours of sleep, but it was not too bad.

Godou sat on the sofa in the lobby facing everyone else, and Erica immediately took a seat by his side.

Getting close like leaning her body against him... No, they were pressed completely tight together, as if she was entrusting all her weight to Godou.

In a rare moment, Erica gazed at Godou with a charming expression lacking in domineering attitude.

Unlike her usual teasing caresses, there was only the desire to confirm each other's touch as they pressed their bodies together. In a certain sense, this behavior was even more affectionate than usual.

And then Godou's gaze met with Yuri's.

The prim, proper and beautiful Hime-Miko averted her eyes shyly for an instant, but immediately smiled with calm composure as if she had not witnessed Erica's intoxicated expression beside him, and then began to gaze resolutely at the one she admired.

It was a kind of beauty different from her usual self. Like the blooming of a flower bud, she had awakened as a woman...

Ena also gave off a different impression than before, acting rather awkwardly in front of Godou with a sense of restlessness, so shy that she had trouble facing his direct gaze. It was indescribably adorable, and entirely different from the usually cheerful and outspoken Ena.

Habitually paying no thought to her gender in the past, she finally became aware of her identity as a woman, causing her to be at a loss.

As for Liliana, her attitude became rather strange.

The righteous awe and solemnity of the female knight was the same, but her facial expressions and motions were more gentle than usual. The innocent charm and sense of flowing tenderness were especially conspicuous. Her gaze towards Godou was filled with a gentle expression that one would only show towards their beloved, and she looked like she was sharing some sort of secret with an accomplice. What was up with her? Why was she acting like this?

This must be the kind of feeling Erica mentioned some time ago, the atmosphere surrounding a bodyguard who was also a lover!

Liliana suddenly spoke.

"By the way, Kusanagi Godou, about the earlier incident..."

As if responding to the pleasurable times of the tongue tasting earlier, she was speaking with an intoxicated tone of voice:

"About the ritual earlier, I am very sorry that I unwittingly lost control in the excitement. N-Next time I will surely stay calm and composed to receive your love. As your premier knight, I will definitely do it."

Hearing her sudden unexpected promise, Godou began to shrink back and retreat.

After the ritual ended, Godou's mental state of absolute calm disappeared. How could that sort of thing have happened... Great unease overflowed from within since this time was different. In the past, that kind of behavior was always obviously forced!

"I-I have something to tell everyone first. I feel like I wasn't myself at the time, it must have been the result of Verethragna's authority making me act out of control..."

"You really weren't your usual self, but I don't think it was out of control."

Erica spoke with ice-cream melting sweetness, and brought her lips close to Godou's ear as if having pillow talk.

"What are you talking about, I completely didn't get the feeling that your personality changed at all, yes... Rather, it'd be best if the regular Godou acted as maturely as that in a few years' time."

"Well said... I have renewed my understanding about what kind of person Godou-san truly is."

Yuri was in deep thought.

Completely ignoring the indecent behavior of the blonde beauty , her eyes gazing at Godou seemed to be hiding some secret that was supporting her resolute will.

"Godou-san treats us... No, not only us but all females with unnatural wariness. Yesterday was the most natural act he had ever done without reservation after making his decision."

"Ah — I sort of get it now, there are still many things about boys that Ena needs to get used to."

It was hard to believe that the premier Hime-Miko was now speaking so shyly when she should have been the most outspoken. There was a certain sexiness to her tone of voice, adding an extra touch of femininity compared to usual.

"If His Majesty begins to accustom himself to girls, that should basically be the way he acts. Hohoho, how I look forward to it."

"He is already like a monster, it is hard to imagine that he still has room to grow..."

Liliana sighed deeply in awe.

"Truly befitting of the man who is my lord. Such impressive magnanimity."

"To have taken possession of us with such forcefulness, please take responsibility and spoil us with your love until the very end... However, I expect him to maintain the usual ambiguous relationship..."

"That's right, Ena is now in His Majesty's care until the day she dies. If he doesn't take this responsibility, he is not worthy to be king."

"Can we stop mentioning these things during a crisis situation like this? Of course, I too, hope that Godou-san can treat me like that..."

Erica murmured blissfully while Ena expressed agreement and Yuri made her opinion known after chastising the others.

Was this what was called being backed into a corner? Or perhaps the crossroads of a lifetime?

Godou was greatly stunned, but he still managed to bring the topic back to their most pressing problem.

"I-I think right now everyone should set aside the discussion of things like the ritual and the protection, okay? We must make proper battle plans to take Hikari back from the Great Sage Equaling Heaven. Today will be the crucial moment..."

"Oh my, but I don't really think that's necessary."

The one objecting was Erica, who separated herself from Godou and recovered her usual demeanor.

"Godou has already obtained the [Sword] for slaying the Great Sage while the rest of us have received [Protection]. Furthermore, we have tactics to prevent the manifestation of the two subordinate gods. Under all these conditions, there is only one thing left to do."

"Correct. A simple and direct duel, that's all."

With Erica and Ena in agreement, consensus was established between the wise and the wild factions of the group.

As the two glanced at each other, a graceful smile was met with a fearless one. It seemed like there was some kind of covert competition going on.

Anyway, the opinion of the two girls was correct.

It had already come to this, so there was no reason to be led astray by unnecessary thoughts.

Godou made a sign to Liliana with his eyes.

The knight who was also a witch nodded immediately. After getting along for these several months, they were finally able to achieve silent understanding.

It was the darkest night just before dawn.

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven reclined horizontally on the golden cloud suspended in midair. He was not off guard, but was sensing his divine power exerting its influence in the surroundings with Nantaisan at the center, molding them after the Water Curtain Cave at the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit to become his kingdom. Humans lost their intelligence, turned into monkeys and recovered their feral nature.

"Wouldn't it be fun to use these fellows to invade and conquer the human's territory... Oh, it came at last?"

Feeling like he was being watched, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven pushed himself and got up. This was a spell used by human Daoist priestesses. Someone is sending their vision flying here to peek at me, the great Sun Wukong. Something like that, I can simply blow away with a breath through my nose...

But of course, he was not going to do something like that.

This was clearly a godslayer's doing.

The Great Sage laughed with his monkey face and changed his outfit using divine power, putting on leather armor similar to that worn by theatrical actors.

Rather than heavy steel armor, it consisted of just a light breastplate, gauntlets and leg guards. A battle outfit suited to the

monkey king whose speed and agility were unmatched. Of course, he did not forget to take his Ruyi Staff either.

Riding on his cloud and flying around, he surveyed his territory .

Nantaisan, Lake Chuuzenji, Senjougahara with its vast plains of wetlands, as well as the little lake of Yunoko to the north.

Traversing the Iroha-saku Route, he flew to the skies of his new territory, the city streets of Nikkou.

With Toushouguu, Futarasan Shrine and Rinnouji turned into a stone prison, overall the streets gave a feeling of a small yet complete and functioning kingdom. The Great Sage flew to the airspace above the Daiyagawa.

Monkeys casually roamed the streets under the cover of darkness.

Whether transformed during their sleep or just before dawn, they were all humans who had become the monkey king's underlings.

Looking down upon his people, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven showed off a U-turn.

That particular place looked like a very appropriate battlefield for going all out. Having decided that, the Great Sage drove his cloud in that direction and got there immediately.

"Excellent, excellent. This place is nice, haha!"

Yelling and calling out in excitement, the Great Sage jumped down from his cloud. The battlefield chosen was the plains of Senjougahara, the plateau covered by the brilliant colors of green and red leaves, full of the natural feeling of highlands and abundant in rivers, streams, walking paths, etc.

Then a beam of light came from the south. It was flight magic, bringing the brat, Kusanagi, and his female companions as they descended before the Great Sage's eyes.

This fellow intended to come right from the very beginning, just as expected. The Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong, nodded his head.

Part 3

"Hohoho... Just by yourself, Kusanagi brat? If you want to call forth your godslayer companions, I can wait for you."

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven did not bother counting the girls. Even if humans entered his sight, he would most likely ignore them. Godou immediately retorted:

"For an opponent like you, I alone am enough... Besides, if another Campione joins in, you're going to summon your brothers for help, right?"

"What, so you have already noticed... Looks like your battle instincts are very sharp."

Having twice witnessed the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong's terrifying power that exceeded every single god that Godou had ever met to this point, it was clear that the divine monkey possessed overwhelming strength. However, he currently did not give off that kind of feeling.

Still, the fact remained that Godou was facing a war god with vast and varied powers.

In terms of raw combat ability, he must have surpassed both Athena and Perseus, but if one counted his other powers, the abilities witnessed at Toushouguu and Lake Chuuzenji seemed rather out of the ordinary.

"When we Campiones encounter gods, we feel great power stir and overflow from within. I expect it's the same with you, in a battle between gods and Campiones, when faced with numerical disadvantage, unlimited power will flow forth for the sake of defeating the enemies."

"That's right, vanquishing you godslaying devil kings to return peace to the world is the heavenly mandate of gods."

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven nodded cautiously at Godou's correct guess.

"As long as the conditions are met, I can obtain the power I need to destroy you all from the heaven, the earth, as well as the stars. However, not all gods share this ability, for only a minority of

sword gods with substantial might and clout possesses such an authority... Anyway, this kind of task for Old Sun here is just a piece of cake."

"What returning peace to the world, stop running your mouth, you make no sense! You're the one causing a commotion right now !"

"Compared to the status of a devil king, this kind of game is nothing, right? Even sacrificing fifty or a hundred thousand people , or wiping out an island country or two like this one, does not affect the grand scheme of things on earth."

Godou sneered and ignored the unreasonable retort.

"Then don't go taking Hikari as a hostage and turning the people of this land into monkeys for a game! I've heard that it is possible that the people who transformed into monkeys might not be able to return to human form!?"

"Those are just the moans and groans of humans suffering their karmic consequences. The world continues to turn regardless... Besides, whenever the number of godslayers increase, chaos is brought forth on earth, and imbalance is created between the living and the underworld. Humans should obey the gods and natural law. Forgetting their place and resisting our divinity is just. .."

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong, finally started to quietly emit murderous intent, and entered a stance with the Ruyi Staff.

"Hence, wiping you all off the face of the earth is our mission of justice. Come, Kusanagi brat! Stop with the nagging and let us fight!"

"Fine! I will show you my — no, mankind's willpower!"

"Ha! Apart from your will, you are totally a monster with a body beyond mortals, stop kidding yourself!"

As the morning glow covered a corner of the plains of Senjougahara, the decisive battle was finally about to begin.

Keeping their distance, the girls were currently watching this battle.

Erica Blandelli, Liliana Kranjcar, Mariya Yuri and Seishuuin Ena .

They were the ones who swore to follow the Campione Kusanagi Godou through life and death, who became his companions and allies through various intertwined fates.

Before their watchful eyes, Godou used the power of the [Warrior].

The blade of spell words for slaying gods, this was the power wielded by Verethragna's tenth incarnation.

"Whenever the name of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong, is mentioned, one inevitably recalls Sanzang the Monk's

follower, the deity born from a chaotic mix of all sorts of religions and folk beliefs under the influence of Buddhism, Daoism, and Chinese shamanism."

Godou's surroundings were filled with spheres of light.

The light expanded by ten, twenty, thirty times in number. This was the sword of spell words.

"Furthermore, you are also a war god of [Steel]. Despite being a monkey god, you are also a war god with deep ties to iron — this crucial key can be understood through the process of how the *Journey to the West* was created!"

"Oh... Is this the same type as the Kulikaa Sword? An evil-vanquishing sword of justice born from wisdom."

In this space completely filled with hundreds of spheres of light, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven analyzed calmly.

"The *Journey to the West* was born by collecting operas, novels and folk legends featuring Sun Wukong as the protagonist. Hence, it can be said to be the grand culmination of all of Sun Wukong's legends. The source material mostly inherits from myths and folk stories passed down the ages, the most important being China — the culture of the Han people was frequently assimilated influences from foreign cultures!"

A great many spheres of light rushed towards the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, attacking in waves from all directions.

However, the Great Sage's agility was fast as lightning, and he dodged them all.

"Hahahahahaha! Though it looks like a troublesome sword, it's meaningless if you can't hit me."

The Great Sage made a back flip and jumped onto his golden cloud.

Flying freely in the heavens, he evaded the [Sword]'s pursuit, moving faster and faster!

I see. Godou discerned the truth. Unlike Verethragna's [Raptor], the Great Sage Equaling Heaven did not have the ability to reach maximum speed instantly, and must accelerate in stages.

But once he reached his maximum speed, the monkey king entered the realm of god speed!

"Hmm — ! May my words be weaved, forming the divine sword that vanquishes evil and brings peace. Be dismissed, Great Sage Equaling Heaven!"

Godou made the [Sword] multiply and accelerate.

But it was too late, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven had vanished, causing hundreds of [Swords] to lose their target. The blades of light were unable to strike the hero within the realm of god speed, not even a scratch!

Somehow, Godou knew that the Great Sage was currently rapidly ascending up into sky.

He ordered several dozens of the swords of light to pursue, but the Great Sage still shook off their trail. Too fast! Who knew his favorite authority of god speed was such a dangerous existence when used in the hands of enemies!

'When facing an opponent in battle, what are you doing, standing there dazed!?'

It was a muffled voice that sounded very distant. As he felt a chill down his spine, an omen of danger, Godou gathered the nearby [Swords] back to his side, guarding his head and back. Immediately, something descended from the sky like a bolt of lightning!

Clang! The sound of impact. It felt like someone extremely fast had descended and left again in an instant.

'Hohoho, blocking that just now was just your luck, let's try it a second time, eh?'

The Great Sage was planning on using hit-and-run tactics?

No. The warrior form had the power to understand an enemy completely. This power told Godou that when using god speed, the Great Sage had difficulty stopping. Like Godou's [Raptor], he was unable to make precise movements.

All it would take is one solid hit. The Great Sage continued to fly away without letting his speed decrease.

However, he should be returning immediately. Will there be a way to block the second and third attacks?

Godou was clearly disadvantaged. Concerned with the battle, the girls began to get nervous.

"Everyone... In order to protect that person, I implore you all to assist me."

The first to speak was Yuri, who bowed her head and requested with propriety.

"Though the power bestowed to me can assist him, it cannot protect him, which is why everyone's power is needed."

Stepping forward, Yuri showed a resolute expression.

Yuri's beauty carried solemnity impossible to defile, and greatly inspired righteous awe.

"You have no need to make this kind of request. Kusanagi Godou is the king of all of us. Upon my pride as a knight... Rather, my love, I will surely protect him! So I will use everything and anything I can lay my hands on. Hence, Yuri, please support us with everything you have!"

The one who responded in this unyielding manner was Erica of course.

More glamorous than anyone and dazzling in her abundant talent, the beautiful maiden swept her hand through her blonde hair that was like a crown.

"Too bad Erica beat me to the punch, but anyway, it is as she said. We are now different from our usual selves, but for the sake of protecting Kusanagi Godou, we must unite our power as a team ."

Liliana spoke in a decisive tone.

Completely clear on what she had to do, she was exceptionally calm.

"Yes, when the conflict with the god begins, there is no time for us to bicker amongst ourselves."

Ena spoke cheerfully but with a slightly savage expression.

She stared sharply into the sky, as if she had caught signs of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven with her five senses.

"Oh my, Ena, let's not talk about internal conflict and enmity for now. Friendly competition between us is necessary to spur progress. I don't think there is a need to go for complete pacifism."

"That makes sense actually, then let us have a competition to see who can help His Majesty the most."

"Stop it you two, do not forget that actions speak louder than words! Mariya Yuri, in a while I will most likely become too occupied to guard you. Will that be fine?"

"Yes. I am already prepared for that, so go and help that person. "

Erica and Ena signaled to each other through their eyes, showing smiles that carried deep meaning.

Liliana admonished them while Yuri answered briefly. Under the two strong leaders, the rest of the girls naturally took initiative in their respective domains.

This was a very individualistic team led by strong leadership.

It was also a very good formation, the result of these girls who each had their own plan, judgment and influence over the others.

"O Warrior of justice, for the son, the father and the companions , let these spell words be transmitted."

Yuri chanted the spell words softly. This incantation of power was the key to releasing the divine warlord's [Protection].

In the next instant, her miko outfit transformed.

Its new appearance was reminiscent of the luxurious kimono known as the juunihitoe[76], and wrapped around the garment was thin fabric akin to a feathered gown. However, the greatest change occurred in her hair.

Yuri's original hair color was like a black pearl's except with an intense tea-brown luster, but now it had turned into brilliantly glowing flaxen-colored hair.

Furthermore, her pupils were now glass-colored like a piece of glassware —

This hair and eye color was identical to the [Princess] Godou once met in the Netherworld.

"Before these lines of scripture, powerful and eloquent, may all enemies cower and tremble before me!"

"All evil shall cower and tremble before the victory that lies within my body!"

Erica and Liliana also chanted spell words and changed in appearance.

Covering their bodies were capes that reached down to their knees, with great contrast in color.

The blonde knight was in red and black.

The silver-haired knight was in blue and black.

Erica's right hand wielded a barbed infantry spear while her left held an oval shield. These were armaments transformed from Cuore di Leone.

Liliana held a silver longbow in her hands, a weapon transformed from Il Maestro.

"O Power, come forth and descend upon my body. For victory and justice!"

Ena chanted the hymn of the divine warlord.

The premier Hime-Miko's uniform transformed into a miko outfit with a white haori and red hakama, covered by a sheer upper garment called chihaya, and a diadem appeared on her head, secured by hairpins.

It was the official attire worn by miko when performing the kagura dance.

"When the location of the gods is revealed... Wind blows through the branches scattering flowers!"

Wearing the juunihitoe, Yuri whispered softly as she awakened new spirit powers, liberating her psyche and ectoplasm from the constraints of the body, letting her consciousness expand outwards like tendrils into the outside world.

The minds of Erica, Liliana and Ena could all be understood for the most part.

She could also sense the great and intense willpower of Kusanagi Godou and the Great Sage Equaling Heaven.

Psychic sensing — Yuri had now evolved into a user of psychic sensing who surpassed Princess Alice. Using this power of spirit sense, her mind's eye became clear and sharp.

This was Avalokitasvara's universal vision, the ultimate mind's eye that Luo Hao used to see through the [Raptor]'s godly speed.

...Saw it! Yuri's mind's eye was able to capture clearly the flying form of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven that human eyes definitely could not see. The visual intelligence obtained was immediately sent to the other three through psychic sensing.

Yuri's mind's eye became the eyes of Erica, Liliana and Ena, acting as universal vision that was able to capture god speed. Liliana was the first to act upon this blessing.

Wielding the silver bow in her left, she manifested silver arrows in her right.

An arrow was rapidly shot out, turning into a flash of silver light.

If this continues, I will surely die. After blocking the Great Sage Equaling Heaven's first attack, Godou immediately began to get anxious.

Just as he was about to move the [Sword] haphazardly — he received quite a shock.

'Wow! Danger danger! You guys can actually see me!?'

A flash of silver light had streaked past Godou's head. Was that what halted the Great Sage's rapidly descending attack?

"Kusanagi Godou, leave the defense to us!"

"Please concentrate on attacking, for we will guard you well!"

Running out before his eyes were Erica and Liliana, wearing the sacred knightly attire last seen in the Ama no Murakumo incident. So that's what's happening, they were using [Protection].

As Godou nodded, Erica put up her shield to block the forward direction.

"Hmm — !"

Clang! With the sound of impact, Erica and her shield were sent flying, apparently having taken a hit from the Great Sage Equaling Heaven. Liliana immediately shot another silver arrow in front of Godou, slicing through the air.

Godou could sense it, that something extraordinarily fast had left.

Though he did not quite understand what was going on, but the girls seemed to be able to discern the Great Sage's god speed to some degree, and react to it!

'—Godou-san, please accept my spirit!'

A voice calling him was suddenly heard. No, actually it was a whisper conveyed to his heart directly?

These were Yuri's thoughts. Due to the bonds established by the protection, Godou immediately understood that Verethragna's authority had bestowed upon the Hime-Miko the same power possessed by Princess Alice.

Receiving these mental waves, Godou's vision immediately changed.

This was the realm of universal vision possessed by Yuri, the ultimate mind's eye technique that discerned everything before their eyes.

Graced by this blessing, Godou could also clearly see the Great Sage Equaling Heaven's movements of god speed. The quick-as-lightning divine monkey was standing on his cloud, flying back and forth in a Z-shape like a bolt of lightning.

And then he suddenly descended from the sky, intending to smash his Ruyi Staff down upon Godou's head.

Liliana's sacred silver arrow pinned him down from using this move.

Fired individually, the arrows were easy to evade, so the silver knight held pairs of arrows between the fingers in her right hand, firing eight arrows all at once.

This was repeated a good many times, firing silver arrows like a hail of bullets, it was basically a rain of arrows.

However, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven evaded in the air with the mobility of god speed and flew right in front of Godou, smashing down with his Ruyi Staff once again.

Erica's shield blocked this deadly weapon. No matter how divine the speed of the enemy, he had no other way of attacking except by approaching the target. Erica focused on defending Godou and dutifully fulfilled her responsibility.

Then Liliana continued attacking the air with the silver arrows as Erica carried on with Godou's defense.

'Godou-san, next it is time for you to attack!'

"Hey... Even that is possible!?"

Hearing the whispers transmitted by mental waves, psychic sensing instructed him how to proceed from here on. This was an attack never tried before, could it be something that Yuri learned through spirit vision?

'Yes, this is the oracle I received just now. If this is not done, victory cannot be obtained.'

Cautioned by her, Godou looked up at the enemy flying around back and forth.

— It was true that a risky move would be necessary to suppress an opponent with such ridiculous speed.

Steeling his determination, Godou stared at the eastern sky. The dawn sky's rose-colored rays illuminated the earth from that direction.

Over there was the sun, the symbol of Verethragna's third incarnation, the [White Stallion].

"For victory, hasten forth before me! O immortal sun, please grant radiance to the stallion. O stallion that moves godlike with wondrous grace, bring forth the halo of thy master!"

The incarnation that could only be employed against a great sinner causing suffering to the masses, and Godou's greatest firepower in his arsenal.

Chanting the spell words to liberate this form, he did not stop the [Warrior], however, because he still needed the blade of spell words for the next part!

Combining two incarnations into one!

Uniting the sword of spell words with the flames of the sun!

"Hmm aaaaaaaaaahh!!"

The brain felt like it was on fire. So hot. The heart felt like it was about to burst, spurting blood until it went dry. Godou's body felt as if it was being crushed by some sort of heavy object, and his legs were bolted into the ground.

Even so, Godou gritted his teeth and finished performing the move.

"Glorious lord of the sun, Mithra be praised! To conquer all enemies, pray bestow upon my strongest self thousands of light and thousands of swords!"

From the eastern sky came solar radiance that was not being used like a cannon blast as before. A white sphere of light appeared in the sky hovering above the plains of Senjougahara.

With two suns in the sky shining upon the land, Godou made all the [Swords] fly and gather towards the second white sun. Thousands of swords of light melded together with the luminous stellar mass.

'Oh, is that a new sun!?'

Circling high in the air above, preparing for another attack, the Great Sage yelled.

Godou fired the new swords and the white-colored sun shot a beam of bright light like a laser. The delicate swords of light were able to lock on to the godly fast Handsome Monkey King, and whizzed past over his head.

"Such heat!? And to think it even moved faster than me!? Impossible!"

Only a few strands of fur were singed, but contact was definitely made. Melding the embodiment of the sun, the [White Stallion], with the [Sword], the result was this beam of light — a light speed weapon.

This move did not lose to the Great Sage Equaling Heaven's god speed, perhaps it even offered a chance for victory!?

"Uh... Erica, can I entrust all defense to you? I have no way of defending right now."

"Of course, that is why I am here!"

Godou felt his head being fried by a frightening amount of heat. The burden of using two incarnations simultaneously was more painful than could be imagined.

Hearing the request he made under great pain, Erica immediately agreed.

Meanwhile, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven continued to fly in Z-shapes, charging madly in the sky. Liliana fired volleys of arrows without pause to restrain his movements. Though there were no signs of Ena yet, she was surely around controlling the situation. Even though he was in pain, Godou was certain that all his companions were supporting him.

I will absolutely not allow myself to suffer defeat here! Godou gritted his teeth in determination.

"Mariya, go help the people who have transformed into monkeys and lead them away!"

'Leave it to me, and vanquish the Great Sage without any worries!'

Yuri's psychic sensing flew over Senjougahara, reaching the area of Okunikkou — and then it filled the entire city streets of Nikkou, including all of the territory dominated by the Handsome Monkey King.

Her mental waves searched for the people that had turned into monkeys and needed help.

Then Godou proceeded to compose spell words once again.

"When it comes to Chinese history, there are frequent mentions of nomadic and horse-mounted tribes! The northern Di and western Rong tribes during the Spring and Autumn Period, the Huns who threatened China for a long time since the Warring States Period, the Northern Wei Dynasty that unified northern China, their descendants the Xianbei tribe which assimilated itself into the cultural circles of the Sui and Tang Dynasties, as well as the Liao Dynasty of the Khitan people, and finally the Yuan Dynasty — Mongolia!"

The white-colored sun released thousands of [Swords]. It not only shot at the four cardinal directions but in all three hundred and sixty degrees at light speed.

"It was not limited to the ruling class. Even amongst the commoners there was a commingling of ethnicities and nations, and the mixing of Han and nomadic culture. Naturally, the pantheon of gods was also affected by this."

Led by Yuri's sensing, there was no need to aim precisely. Godou was immensely grateful for that since his brain felt as if it was burning to ashes.

"And then came the archetype of the complicated hybrid deity — rather, the epitome is the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong!"

The [Sword] passed through trees, traversed mountains, crossed rivers and plains, and returned to town once again. The white flash penetrated all walls and obstacles in its path, slicing apart all the monkeys who were the Great Sage's underlings.

"Though Daoism, Buddhism and other mystic religions from China have many key differences, it is notable that the myths related to the Great Sage Equaling Heaven are particularly numerous. Most symbolic are the series of anecdotes including ' being born from stone', 'being scorched by the cauldron's fire', ' having a body of steel', etc."

The sacred flashing light raced across the lands beneath the morning glow.

This was the birth scene of a new ruler to replace the abominable monkey king.

"These myths are all common themes for the heroes of [Steel]. Born from stone, burnt in a furnace, obtaining immortality — namely, the body of steel. This is the process of a sword's forging. The furnace smelts iron ore to produce steel, and steel is forged into a sword. So-called heroes of steel are actually swords, or in other words, living sword gods!"

Severed by the solar [Sword], the people were all liberated from the rule of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven.

They returned to human form once more.

Japanese monkeys, gibbons, chimpanzees, orangutans, mountain gorillas, etc —

All sorts of monkeys disappeared in an instant, and as if reborn, turned back into male and female, old and young. The time it took to bring salvation to everyone was most likely four or five minutes. This swiftness was only possible due to the light speed weapon.

Through Yuri's psychic sensing, Godou felt all the restored people collapse in deep slumber.

Standing in the plains of Senjougahara, Godou breathed out deeply in relief, knowing that all the people in the area had been saved.

Furthermore, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven gradually decreased his speed. What was he planning? The knights were careful not to lose their guard.

Finally out of god speed and returned to normal levels, the Great Sage leaped down from his golden cloud.

Standing right in front, he stared straight at Godou's face.

"Kusanagi, you... And these annoying humans, please remind yourself you are just flunkies! Be gone from my sight!"

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven roared at Liliana who kept shooting at him, as well as Erica who blocked his advance, sending the two Great Knights flying just like that.

"Hohoho... Eliminating all my underlings and returning them to human form, eh... How amazing, you did well! Hmph hmph, hohoho! It makes my blood boil."

The golden-gaze fiery-eyes were burning, and the red eyeballs and golden pupils flashed brightly.

"The miko I took away from you is right here."

Appearing from the Great Sage Equaling Heaven's right hand was a transparent sphere, as small as a golf ball. Inside the sphere, Mariya Hikari was lying down in her miko outfit as if asleep.

"Even if things have come to this... I still have many ways to deal with you. Let's say, for example, I will crush this fellow here like a bug if you dare resist."

The Great Sage swallowed the sphere containing Hikari and licked his lips.

"But I won't do that. Let's have an exhilarating fight with our weapons and fists to prove who is the strongest. That is the most important! Come, come and hurry! Let us decide who is the victor, and if you want to take back this little lady, slice open my belly!"

Pointing the Ruyi Staff at Godou, the Great Sage yelled.

"That is my plan right from the very start! Except it includes them as well!"

Standing beside Godou were the red and blue Great Knights, as well as Yuri assisting him using psychic sensing from the side. Leading them, Godou retorted without holding back:

"These people are all a part of me... They are my essential companions for defeating you. I will fight alongside them to put an end to you, and I won't allow you to call them flunkies!"

"I can't believe you indulge your lust to this degree... Fine, whatever, watch me, the Great Sage, send you all flying with a kick!"

The Great Sage stuck his Ruyi Staff into the ground.

Appearing out of the ground were the same sort of giant monkeys as seen before. This time there were nine! The appearance of these formidable foes made Erica and Liliana swallow a few quick breaths, while Yuri's consciousness also began to show signs of fear.

(...Ena expected this to happen from the start. So Your Majesty, please. Lend it — please lend Ena's partner to Ena to use!)

Godou suddenly heard a 'voice' which carried thoughts from the sword hidden in his right arm. Godou took notice immediately .

"Partner... Is it that fellow?"

Due to the request, Godou realized there could be no other possibility. Perhaps because the former user was under [Protection], Godou could now feel its existence more tangibly than usual.

Godou relaxed his right arm and passed the right of usage over. It went without saying that the name of the sword was —

"Come, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi! The imperial sword granted by my king, now is the time for it to be swung!"

With the sudden rise of wind, a loud and clear voice reverberated in the surroundings.

In the area before the giant monkeys — the underlings of the Great Sage, the wind gathered into a tornado, and the miko appeared in its center.

The Hime-Miko of the Sword — Seishuuin Ena.

Wearing the official attire of a miko outfit with chihaya, she held the nostalgic black divine blade in her hand. Her body was also infused with double the normal amount of Susanoo's divine power! Was this strengthened as a result of Verethragna's protection!?

"Yamato Yamato, elite of the nation, endless rolling green mountains, encircled by the walls of the summit, beautiful Yamato! "

Ena's spell words caused strong wind to blow. The destructive gales pinned down the giant monkeys, immobilizing them.

"Yaaaaaaaaaah!"

With a high-pitched yell, Ena charged forth to attack.

The gales easily imprisoned the giant apes, as befitting of the divine messenger of the god of storms. Faced against these enemies restrained by the strong wind, she ran forward as if completely unaffected by the wind herself.

Casually jumping onto the lower leg of one of the giant apes, she stabbed her partner into her enemy's weak point.

ROOOOAAAAAAR! The giant ape screamed in pain.

Ena proceeded to jump nimbly, flying high in the air she slashed Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi horizontally. This cleanly severed the carotid artery of the giant ape, slaying it immediately. Slicing through the critical weaknesses of the enemy, Ama no Murakumo destroyed a divine beast on the level of dragons.

Ena used the same method and cut down the giant apes one after another. Though the giant apes were poor in reacting, they were still able to mount an effective defense by the time Ena slew the third one.

Taking a deep breath, the giant apes inhaled the violent wind controlled by Ena, finally countering the intense gales and regaining their freedom. Ena must have been lying in ambush all this time for the sake of this surprise attack.

However, in terms of overall numbers, the odds were still unfavorable.

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven and six giant monkeys remained as their enemies. Thus the bleak second round began.

Part 4

The intense sound of battle woke Mariya Hikari from her slumber.

There were weapons flying back and forth all around and the chanting of spell words.

"The custom of regarding swords as gods, first originated from the nomadic equestrian tribe that invented, passed down, and spread their culture."

Hikari heard a familiar voice, chanting the spell words for slicing gods apart.

This was the voice of Kusanagi Godou — the youth loved by Hikari's various Onee-samas.

"That tribe was the Scythians, a fierce people from which the culture of nomadic equestrian herdsmen was born."

Every time he finished chanting a verse, the white-colored sun released a flash of light.

Creating formless blades for severing a god, these laser beams streaked across empty space at the speed of light. Furthermore, these horrifying weapons stacked up on one another to begin a continuous series of rapid and heavy attacks.

"That was not all that the Scythians invented. They were also a tribe skilled in forging iron. Precisely because they excelled at forging iron, the sword gods of steel were born."

Simultaneous slicing attacks came from four directions — up, down, left, and right, together with a triple series of attacks separated by timed delays.

"Herodotus was the first to record in history the name of the Scythians, and their use of the sword as the symbol of the Scythian war god Ares. The sword that stands upon the great earth, is the true artifact that stands in history as the symbol of the god of war!"

The continuous attacks of complicated flashing lights displayed fierce momentum.

However, it was far too unbelievable how all these attacks continued to miss Hikari's body by the frighteningly slimmest of margins.

Standing on the golden cloud, flying and gliding in the air, the Great Sage used all sorts of techniques to evade Kusanagi Godou's attacks. Sometimes he did tricks in the air similar to stunt flying, while at other times he flew with all his strength, charging at maximum speed. To be able to dodge light speed attacks, it truly was god speed.

In terms of pure speed, the swords of light should be faster actually.

However, the difference in speed was not decisive, and could be compensated through flying technique, though just barely.

...Right, the one fighting Kusanagi Godou was not Hikari.

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong, had swallowed Mariya Hikari within his body.

"Acala's sharp sword is also one of them! The common theme of 'the sword god standing upright upon the earth', having scattered amongst the legends in various lands, east and west of the ocean, underwent various changes in the elaboration of the sword god's imagery!"

"Hahahahahaha! Correct, that's the truth!"

"Take for example a sword that had just been forged, which needs to undergo the operation of cooling by water. This takes form in the stories of heroes appearing after a passage through water. Achilles became the invincible hero having bathed in the River Styx of Hades; bathed in dragon's blood, Siegfried became the invulnerable hero as well, and you — Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong, are the same as them!"

"Yes! In my case, there are the peaches, the Bagua Cauldron and the elixirs!"

"Thus the creation story of the Scythian sword god was passed down the ages, as proof of Sun Wukong being the war god of steel! Not only combining Daoism with Buddhism, but even the sword god legend from the nomadic equestrian tribes, the strongest hybrid was born! This is your prototype!"

"Kusanagi brat, well done! But so what!?"

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven scoffed at the Campione who was composing the spell words.

"Light as well as the sword of spell words... This move of yours may be a stroke of genius, but I have also understood one point. While you are using this move, your body is full of openings! Are you able to stop the ferocious attacks of Old Sun here!?"

The Great Sage nonchalantly made his cloud accelerate, and charged at Kusanagi Godou.

He had been protected by the three girls all this time. But now the one who took up this mission was —

"Come near now, and kiss me, my son. Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven!"[77]

It was Erica alone. Reciting the incantation for strengthening defense, she rushed over at the same time.

Stepping between Godou and the Great Sage Equaling Heaven. Using the shield with reinforced durability to take on the Ruyi Staff's attack on behalf of her lord.

"Oooh—"

The glamorous and beautiful girl's face became distorted, most likely due to suffering the substantial impact on the shield.

Her knees began to lose strength and collapse, but she still resisted with all her might, continuing to guard her lord. The other two — Ena and Liliana were currently battling the group of divine beasts.

Of the nine giant apes only two remained. Spitting fire, blowing strong gusts of wind, they sent Ena flying despite her current state of divine possession. Liliana ran over to help at this time, using a cooperative strategy to defeat their enemies. She used arrows to provide cover for Ena to mount an attack on the retreating giant apes, and aimed at the weaknesses of those overly focused on Ena.

If these giant apes were left alone, they would instantly charge at the Campione, which is why the two girls must hold them off. This meant that only Erica was left to protect Godou. It was an arduous battle indeed.

"That's right, one of the homelands of the Scythians, the Caucasus is... Guh..."

"Godou!?"

The youth controlling the light began to feel a sense of dizziness . He had once explained that the incarnations usurped from the Warlord Verethragna could only be used one at a time, but now he was using two simultaneously. This must be greatly straining his body.

Taking advantage of this opening, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven plucked two strands of fur from his body and fired them

like needles, striking each of the two underlings that were fighting against Ena and Liliana.

ROOAAR!! The giant apes were greatly roused. Accompanying the sound of roars, one of them charged at Ena while the other aimed its attack at Liliana who was trying to maintain the distance and firing arrows!

Its movements were even faster than before! The massive body over 10m tall was running with speed akin to lightning.

"Watch me end you with one slice of my sword! Haaaaaah!"

As one of the giant monkeys hammered its fist down upon Ena's head, the Hime-Miko of the Sword jumped to the side and evaded. Then with a single flash of Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi , the counterattack amputated the divine beast's fist by severing the wrist.

This terrifying sword technique, which could only be performed by using Susanoo's divine blade, sent blue-colored blood splattering everywhere. However, this blood began to combust after it splashed upon Ena's body. As if oil had been added to a fire, the miko outfit and the chihaya, stained by the fresh blue blood, began to burn intensely.

"Aaaaaaaah!"

Ena screamed in agony as the giant ape followed up with a massive swing of its left hand. Squashed between the ground and the giant ape's palm, the Hime-Miko was immobilized with pain.

"Wah!? Damn it... It's not over that easily!"

Vomiting blood, Ena summoned a whirlwind.

The whirlwind swept upwards, like sword blades that have been sharpened to incredible levels — the kamaitachi.[78]

The invisible sickle blades severed the giant ape's blood vessels, tendons and shins. Without even the chance to cry out, the giant ape turned into a pile of sand and collapsed.

Having obtained victory, Ena used the wind to extinguish the remaining fire on the miko outfit.

However, pushing herself to this point was the absolute limit and she laid herself down on the ground and remained motionless in complete exhaustion.

Meanwhile, Liliana planned to use the silver arrows to halt the advance of the second giant ape. Firing arrows into its left eye, shoulder and bulging chest, Liliana succeeded in making the giant ape give off roars of anger and pain, but it was not enough. Already approaching near, the giant ape suddenly reached out with its right hand and caught Liliana.

The slender fairy's body was caught by a monster like King Kong. Having captured Liliana, the giant ape held its fist tight with all its might.

"Guuh... And they warred against the Midianites, as the Lord commanded Moses; and they slew all the males. And they slew the

kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain; namely, Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, five kings of Midian __"[79]

With no other strength to support her but a Great Knight's pride , Liliana continued to recite spell words in spite of her condition. As a result of her struggling efforts, light descended from the heavens onto the blue knight.

"And the children of Israel took all the women of Midian captives, and their little ones, and took the spoil of all their cattle, and all their flocks, and all their goods. And they burnt all their cities wherein they dwelt, and all their goodly castles, with fire."[80]

GAAAAAH! Incredibly, the giant ape wailed with suffering, relaxing its grip that was about to crush Liliana to death.

"And they took all the spoil, and all the prey, both of men and of beasts. And they brought the captives, and the prey, and the spoil, unto Moses."[81]

Liliana was being surrounded by blue light as she readied her bow with a solemn expression.

This was not just the sight of a soldier but a paladino and a saint . With such an air that would compel people to sing praises in her name, Liliana set a silver arrow onto the bowstring.

The giant ape spewed forth intense flames from its mouth, but the sacred vestments worn by Liliana were completely free from damage. While resisting the flames, she shot the arrow into the giant ape's mouth. The impressively-built body of the giant ape instantly scattered into sand which blew away with the wind. However, Liliana too, had reached her absolute limits.

Having displayed overwhelming power, Liliana collapsed forward and remained motionless.

"Lily... So you used the Smiting spell words. That's right, in our current state, it is possible to use that secret ritual — And seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the Lord went on continually, and blew with the trumpets: and the armed men went before them!"[82]

Having witnessed her childhood friend's valorous battle, Erica also chanted a new incantation.

Continuing to defend against the attacks of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, she also seemed like she was reaching her limits. Her steps becoming unsteady, she needed to use the spear as a crutch in order to stand.

Behind her, Godou narrowed his eyes, trying to catch up to the monkey king's god speed.

"They compassed the city seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city.

And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword."[83]

Out from the surface of the ground drifted a red mist that enveloped Erica's body. Immediately, the mist dispersed, causing a change in the impression given off by the red knight. Truly, she looked like a paladino and a saint.

Straightening her back, she wrathfully glared with resolute eyes at the Great Sage Equaling Heaven in his god speed.

"And Joshua adjured them at that time, saying, Cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it."[84]

"Oh!? What is up with this little lady? You even dare to dream of attacking Old Sun here in return!?"

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven had intended to smash Godou's cranium with rapid descent this time, but the divine monkey who had swallowed Hikari was faced with a great shock. Standing between him and the Campione, Erica thrust her spear forward. She had been guarding her lord all this time but now she changed her stance to attack. To have that kind of residual strength — No, she should not have that kind of power!

Right, Hikari nodded her head from within the belly of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven.

The spell words used by Erica and Liliana constituted the [Sacred Privilege of Extermination], the ultimate secret rite of European magic and a power that rivals Seishuuin Ena's divine possession.

As Hikari watched on, Erica's spear and the Great Sage's swinging Ruyi Staff began a direct frontal clash.

The spear shattered. However, despite being divine weaponry, the Ruyi Staff also —

The freely extending steel staff, 13500 catties[85] in weight, was split into two. It was unbelievable that the weapon of the war god possessing lightning divine speed could be destroyed by a mere human!

Furthermore, this attack made Hikari feel the dormant depths of her heart stir from the impact. The feeling of watching a television broadcast disappeared. Her consciousness and feelings restored, she felt a rising tide of emotion wanting to support Kusanagi Godou and his other companions.

...Do your best, Erica-neesama!

As if hearing Hikari cheering for her, the paladino continued her movements, wielding her broken spear to thrust at the Great Sage.

However, her martial prowess could not possibly defeat the war god. The spear's attack was evaded and the severed Ruyi Staff came attacking.

Erica-neesama was sent flying into the distance, falling onto the ground. Due to the great momentum, she rolled over many times on the ground before stopping. Completely motionless, she appeared to have lost consciousness. In the moment of crisis, she barely managed to block the Ruyi Staff's attack with her shield, thereby avoiding a fatal hit...

The female knight, glamorous beyond compare, put forth everything in her power to serve her lord even if it meant soiling her appearance with dirt and mud. Hikari felt very sad to see her like this. God and Campione were finally dueling one on one, and the Great Sage swung his severed Ruyi Staff.

Godou-oniisama showed no intention to dodge and raised his arms to guard his head and face.

In addition to the Ruyi Staff, the Great Sage also kicked and punched his opponent on whim.

But only when the occasional attack went through his defense and was about to hit a critical point did Onii-sama forcefully twist his body to evade. He was currently focused on defending and had completely halted the offense.

However, Onii-sama's eyes sparkled with great intensity as he glared at the furiously attacking Great Sage Equaling Heaven.

Though his eyes were as fierce as a wolf's, he continued to put all his effort into defending — why on earth!?

'Godou-san is reserving his final strength in order to save you.'

"Onee-chan!? What does that last part mean? Besides, Onee-chan shouldn't have this kind of power, right...!?"

Hikari was surprised to find her older sister conversing with her through mental waves. This was the psychic sensing power that Princess Alice had used before, but though Onee-chan was a rare spirit vision user, she should not be a user of psychic sensing!

'We will discuss this some other time... Godou-san will soon be out of strength because using that [Sword] causes heavy strain. At most he can use it at full power once, and he plans to use that final strike for your sake.'

"How could this be! B-But if this continues, Onii-sama is going to be killed!"

He remained standing no matter what kind of attack struck him .

Even when he fell upon one knee, he got up immediately, never giving up on this fight. Watching this battle unfold, Hikari could no longer bear it. She could not bear watching Godou getting hurt any longer. And not just Onii-sama, Erica-neesama, Liliana-neesama and Ena-neesama had all fallen.

'No other way... That is the kind of person he is. Even if he was about to be killed and close to defeat, he would never give up fighting. So please be patient and wait for that man to save you. I will also do my utmost to assist...!'

Injecting absolute trust and determination, Yuri spoke with her thoughts.

Even in a despairing situation or faced with gods as his enemies , he would never abandon his battle spirit or the will to fight. Precisely because of this, he was able to become a Campione and Devil King who usurped divine authority. Gazing intently at the eyes of the Campione, burning with fighting spirit, Hikari felt her heart beginning to race.

Stuck in a situation like this, he did not stop fighting. Not only that, he aimed for victory, fighting for the sake of Hikari and all the people suffering as a result of the Great Sage.

Her chest felt like it was on fire. She could not stand aside any longer! She was not a woman who could observe from the sidelines without doing anything!

"Onee-chan... I also want to fight together! Though I don't know what I can do, if there is anything that can help that man obtain victory, I will put all my effort into it! So please tell him this: I have absolute trust in your victory, please fight to the very end!"

'Very well, I understand... For the sake of Hikari, I will also do everything I can, so you have to do your best—'

Ending the mental conversation with her older sister, Hikari furiously searched her thoughts. The only spirit power she possessed was disaster purification which could only affect gods slightly — limited to nullifying magical power or spells, but if the

other party was a powerful god, then not much of an effect could be expected.

How could she use it in a way to help Godou-oniisama, to help that person?

Despite being stuck in a predicament where all he could do was defend one-sidedly, Godou endured with all his might.

Entering into all-out close-quarter combat with a war god like the Great Sage Equaling Heaven would probably mean defeat in a few seconds. Even so, it was not yet time to use the [Camel]. Before Hikari is rescued, the [Sword] cannot be abandoned.

However, the scorching heat felt even hotter than before and Godou's head felt like it was about to split open from pain. Using two incarnations simultaneously had reached its absolute limit, and there was no way to control it any further.

The only thing Godou could do at this point was endure.

But at least the [Sword] for counterattack was kept in his body, and acted as defensive gear which repelled the attacks of the Great Sage. Perhaps due to it being a weapon to neutralize the power of gods, it could be used as defensive gear? However, this notion was too naive. Though the damage of the attacks were lessened, the effect was far from complete absorption.

This kind of passive approach was really unsuitable. That said, without putting his all into this kind of resistance, he would have been directly beaten to death by the Great Sage Equaling Heaven.

"Hahahahahaha, starting from a while back, you've been taking hits obediently. What's up? Are you out of options!?"

The Great Sage did not get anxious about defeating his enemy quickly. Instead, he calmly continued to beat up his opponent, sending Godou flying with a kick from the front and then using the severed Ruyi Staff for a horizontal sweep, finally aiming a spinning kick at Godou's temples.

Godou was being treated like a punching bag, but he endured relentlessly. Bear it, I have to bear it.

It was not yet time. The Great Sage had not shown an opening so if the light speed sword attacked, he would use his divine speed to evade at the same time. It was necessary to wait until the divine monkey got carried away and showed an opening, when an instant appeared for a guaranteed hit of the [Sword]. If one did not wait for an opportunity of assured success, there was no chance for victory!

'Godou-san, just now I talked to Hikari who is inside the body of the Great Sage.'

The whispers of Yuri's mental waves could be heard.

'She has absolute trust in your victory, so please fight to the very end.'

(What, she's still in good spirits... Really, don't go trusting in other people so easily.)

Godou complained as he muttered to himself, but began to smile.

This was the fierce grin of a warrior. The face of a man whose fighting spirit burned in the face of adversity.

This was proof of the king who shouldered the hopes and prayers of others, turning them into power. If one were to say 'I fight only for myself' at a time like this, it would be clear lack of magnanimity. If you believe that I will surely win, then I must show you what the victory of the true warrior looks like.

'Godou-san, the time for counterattacking has arrived. I will also assist you, so please use your power without reservation!'

(Yes, I understand. I will be in your care, but it is still not yet time...)

While he was secretly conferring with Yuri, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven suddenly halted his attacks.

"Hmm, continuing to use a broken weapon will be a taint upon my divine might. Let me fix this first — Life and death are predestined. Fortune comes from the Heavens. The principal lamp has extinguished!"

Using a mantra to apply divine power, the shattered fragments of the Ruyi Staff flew and returned.

In an instant, they combined together, reconnecting, and restored the divine appearance of the precious iron. It would be impossible to resist the full might of the divine weapon — just as Godou trembled at that thought...

The restored Ruyi Staff crashed down from above upon Godou's head. Impossible to dodge, was this the end!? However, Godou heard Hikari's voice at this time.

'Evil be purified, Disaster be dismissed, Misfortune be exorcised , efficacious signs of the bearer of Fortune, I implore your manifestation!'

This was transmitted via Yuri's psychic sensing, giving voice to the thoughts coming from the belly of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven.

The cry of the young warrior, trying to use the spirit power of disaster purification to escape from the god's domination. Faced with the miko's staunch resistance just as he was using one of his most prized powers to attack, the Great Sage was met with a complete surprise.

Shattered. The newly restored Ruyi Staff shattered once again.

The result was the Great Sage Equaling Heaven's attack missed its target.

This was the spirit power that only Mariya Hikari possessed — disaster purification.

Even the power of gods could be eliminated in part by this strange ability. The captive apprentice Hime-Miko greatly surprised the deity in a critical moment, and just as the monkey face of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven made a stupid expression —!

"Now is the time, Mariya!"

'Yes!'

Noticing Godou's yell, the Great Sage pointed his index finger at the sky.

This was the only chance for counterattacking. The white-colored second sun fired the [Sword] at the Great Sage Equaling Heaven while Godou's brain was being invaded by a terrifying amount of heat and pain.

OWWWWW! His brain felt like it was boiling, but the pain immediately lessened by half.

'Ah, aaaaaaaaah!'

In return, Yuri's screams of agony could be heard from her mental waves because she had used psychic sensing to share the pain that Godou felt. However, to a Hime-Miko who was not a Campione, it must have been pure suffering—

Towards Yuri who took on his pain, as well as the fallen Erica, Liliana and Ena, Godou vowed before he apologized to them.

Sorry to have let everyone suffer, but in return, I shall obtain victory—

The fired [Sword] pierced right through the abdomen of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven!

"In one of the former lands of the Scythians, the Caucasus, the legend of the hero Batraz still remains. For the sake of training, the hero cast himself into a fiery furnace during his youth. The fiery furnace where he chose to train in the scorching heat was the place where dragons were slain and corpses were incinerated. In the end , having his body burned by the scorching flames, Batraz jumped into the sea to cool down, and thus completed his training. As a result, he obtained an immortal body."

Using the [Sword] to separate the ectoplasm from the Great Sage's physical body, Godou searched deep to look for Hikari.

"This legend is extremely similar to the beginnings of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong. Thus the Scythian hero shares essentially the same origins as the monkey. Without a doubt , the people who gave Sun Wukong and the Scythian sword god the same back story were the nomadic tribes who were assimilated into Chinese culture!"

Yes, found her, I can feel Hikari's presence. Within the massive ectoplasm of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, the skinny little human girl imprisoned quietly inside had been found!

Godou charged forward and reached his hand into the Great Sage Equaling Heaven's abdomen, pulling her body out.

"Onii-sama, I always believed you will surely come to save me!"

Godou found himself tightly embraced by the little girl even younger than his own sister.

As he held the miko-outfitted Hikari in his arms, Godou said to the Great Sage:

"...Indeed I have taken her back. Now, it's finally time to fight a real battle without hindering restraints!"

Chapter 7 - Gods and Godslayers, the Climactic Final Battle for Victory

Part 1

Godou was badly beaten up while the Great Sage Equaling Heaven literally had his belly cut open as suggested.

Had either of them succumbed to their heavy injuries, it would not have been surprising, but they dulled the pain through pure willpower alone. Completely ignoring the state of their bodies and maintaining the heightened state of excitement, only gods and Campiones could be this reckless.

Watching this scene unfold was Hikari who had just been rescued. She could no longer hear the thoughts of the person who had been speaking to her.

Due to taking on a portion of the [Sword]'s burden, Yuri also reached her limit and had fallen unconscious somewhere. The second sun in the sky also vanished, having lost the [Sword] it depended on.

"Hikari... Is your body okay?"

"Yes! Thanks to Onii-sama and everyone else, I am completely fine!"

"I see... Then hurry and leave this place and find a place to hide.
"

Godou gently reminded the girl who was embracing him.

"Why? I want to help Onii-sama! I also want to assist you like all the other Onee-sama!"

"No, there's nothing you can help here. Besides..."

Godou coldly released Hikari despite her earnest pleas, for the battle was just about to enter a climax.

"I entrust everyone in your care, Hikari. Erica, Liliana, Seishuuin and your sister far away have all used up their strength. Go immediately to help and take care of them."

"If I do that... I will be helping Onii-sama?"

"Yes, please. You are the only one I can rely on now."

It was now like being in the ninth inning with a one point lead. In order to guard this lead, Godou began to rouse the feelings of outfielders — nostalgic memories from his days as a catcher were even recalled. Treating the girl in his arms as a companion and entrusting her with important tasks, Godou stroked Hikari's head softly.

As a result, the twelve-year-old apprentice Hime-Miko gazed at Godou with blushing cheeks.

"Yes... I will do as Onii-sama says, but you must come back alive. If you don't keep your promise, I won't listen to Onii-sama's orders again. Will you promise me this?"

"I know, in order to make you listen to me from now on, I will definitely return."

As if praising an obedient child, Godou stroked little Hikari's head.

Completely unexpectedly, Hikari drew her young face close and kissed Godou.

"I heard from Ena-neesama and the others, that this is the only way to cast a spell on Onii-sama... This is a spell for treating fatigue, at least let me help you a little like this..."

Hikari left Godou reluctantly and ran over to the collapsed Erica.

There was a certain adult maturity to her... Hikari bore a rather feminine expression. Though Godou had been treating her like a little child, she should be trustworthy from the way she acted just now. Thanks to the spell, the pain had lessened greatly.

"Ha! Kusanagi brat! It's unbelievable that you still have the energy to flirt with girls at a time like this."

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven laughed with a sneer.

"Looks like we can still have another round. Nice nice!"

"You and I are both heavily injured, are you sure it's proper for you to be mocking others?"

"Because I still hold a trump card, it doesn't matter... Watch, this is the thing I prepared just in case."

Suddenly, a familiar figure appeared in the Great Sage's right hand. It was the body of Divine Ancestor Asherah! However, it was very small since her body had shrunk so much it was like a ginseng root. Despite being in such a state, the witch still seemed to be alive, for one could hear her breathing weakly.

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven took a bite out of this tiny witch.

Aaaaaaaaaah! With the sound of soul-screeching screams, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven nonchalantly moved his lower jaw, chewed with his teeth and swallowed her, re-enacting a scene from the *Journey to the West* when he ate a ginseng fruit...

In the next moment, from within the body of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven — out flowed a terrifying amount of divine power!

"Huhahahahahaha! After eating the snake deity, I have recovered my energy! The peerless Old Sun has returned once again!"

"T-That was the reason you took away that witch!?"

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven restored his Ruyi Staff with divine power again, and swung it as quickly as lightning. Godou hastily rolled along the ground as the divine staff of precious iron attacked with great alacrity.

Having lost the [Sword], Godou now needed to battle using other incarnations. However, the [Camel] could not handle attacks from the air while the [White Stallion] had already been used. Was there no other weapon remaining!?

As Godou evaded the Great Sage's attacks, he heard a mocking voice.

...Finally asking me for help? What a troublesome man.

An ice-cold feeling was dwelling in his right arm as the sword he had lent out just now returned to him. Now was the time to use the new weapon that had been waiting patiently to make an entrance.

As the Ruyi Staff came crashing down, Godou jumped sideways with motions like a wild beast to evade.

"Hmm, crap, did I hit too hard?"

Missing its target, the steel staff was embedded into the ground. As the Great Sage pulled his weapon out, Godou adjusted his breathing.

"Damn it... I clearly had no intention of using such a dangerous object as you!"

Though he complained out loud, the corners of Godou's lips were upturned as if smiling.

Since he needed to continue fighting whether he had a weapon or not, something was better than nothing.

Seizing that one-in-a-thousand chance of victory in a hopeless situation, if one couldn't even do that, one was not fit to be a Campione — rather, not fit to be a man!

"Hoho, you look like you too have a trump card up your sleeve. Then let us fight to our hearts' content, Rakshasa King!"

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven jumped onto his golden cloud and flew into the sky.

Accelerating again and again, the Great Sage intended to re-enter the realm of god speed. The new weapon in Godou's hand could not defend against that kind of speed but he was resolved to fight to the very end and obtain victory. No matter what kind of crisis he faced, if he himself didn't believe in his own victory, then of course victory would never grace him with its presence!

Just as Godou planned to concentrate all his power in this despairing battle —

A shooting star streaked across the sky.

Resembling a heavenly flying dragon, it was a flash of brilliant blue-white light, one of the magic bullets shot by the warrior with the black cape!

The dragon of light chased after the Great Sage Equaling Heaven who had took on the form of a golden meteor. But just as it caught up, the prey vanished. Was it because he had entered the realm of god speed? However, John Pluto Smith's bullet also disappeared. Both sides had reached god speed!

'Damn, if that's the case, hah—!"

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven who should have disappeared , suddenly multiplied rapidly in the air, filling the sky with over a hundred divine monkeys. This was a cloning technique! However, these clones began to explode one after another and were soon dispersed into mist, most likely struck down in midair by the divine speeding bullet. Beneath the glow of the morning sky, it was as spectacular as a fireworks celebration.

'The Five Elements form a cycle of restraint, Metal counters Wood!'

As his clones disappeared, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven chanted a mantra.

Lightning was released from within the body of the divine monkey and collided with the approaching blue-white magic bullet.

The magic bullet was finally destroyed, but the Great Sage's golden cloud also returned to normal speed, most likely because he was unable to use other spells while maintaining that kind of godly speed.

"Making me waste unnecessary breath, so another unrelated godslayer is joining in?"

"Unrelated? No, not at all. I came here expressly to bury you. Since John Pluto Smith is entering this battle, prepare yourself to be dragged into the depths of the underworld."

The latecomer was obviously the masked Campione.

The fallen girls could no longer be seen, apparently taken away by Hikari. She must have used healing spells since she should not have the strength to move everyone so quickly by herself.

Anyway, the only ones gathered in this place were now gods and Campiones. Only these two existences and no other!

"Hmph, what an audacious man... You have met my bros before , right? Let us display the solidarity of us sworn brothers, and defeat all the godslayers! From the ocean of the north, come, my virtuous little brother, Zhu Ganglie! From the territories of the west, come, my virtuous little brother, Vaisravana!"

The entrance of John Pluto Smith caused the Great Sage Equaling Heaven's divine power to rise explosively.

The two little figurines were thrown into the air.

"Vanquishing devils, ripping evil spirits apart, star of the sword god which slaughters Rakshasa! Bestow upon me the sharp sword to vanquish my mortal enemies!"

As the two figurines expanded in one motion, their appearance also began to change.

The first to appear was the giant with a pig's head. Clad in black clothes with armor of the same color, he made his entrance as a giant god, standing 15m tall with three heads and six arms still!

Next to manifest was the demonic deity with black skin and red spiky hair, standing on pillars of water that spewed forth like geysers, forming a dragon of water!

"Hohohoho, I hope this time I can play a little while longer, Big Bro."

"Appearing here in response to Big Bro's summon, I am ready to fulfill your every command."

Manifesting behind the slowly flying Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Zhu Ganglie and Vaisravana shouted.

Before the three deities, Godou spoke to his masked ally:

"I am grateful for your help, but we are still outnumbered, the disadvantage of two against three remains."

"I don't need you to teach me this kind of infantile mental math."

Smith fluttered the cape on his shoulders in response to his junior's reminder.

"On the other hand, there is also the saying 'two heads are better than one'... I think the current situation is rather fitting. Anyway, the main point is, I want a chance for me to show off. If you insist on keeping such a delicious situation all to yourself, that would make you a very stingy man, so lowly that I don't even need to mock you."

Hearing him casually spout such roundabout words, Godou could not help but smile wryly. In such a situation, who could have expected him to make such comments when he was entitled to additional concessions.

Watching the performance of the man before him who loved to role-play, Godou somehow felt a strange sense of intimacy with him.

"What you seem to be trying to say, is that John Pluto Smith considers Kusanagi Godou a friend, and a man who won't pose a hindrance to you — is that right?"

"Oh my oh my, you really think you can trust a mysterious man like me? Don't regret it!"

Smith and Godou joked with each other as they stood side by side, looking up at the gods in the sky.

This argumentative conversation felt unexpectedly delightful. Never yielding verbally, this quirk of his seems to fit quite well with me. Confirming that they turned out to be surprisingly compatible, Godou smiled.

"You are really quite the busybody. My luck has always been great and I have never regretted any of my choices in companions. I don't expect this to ever change. Right, one more thing..."

Godou recalled Sayanomiya Kaoru's phone call.

Lu Yinghua had apparently heard the sound of some kind of commotion. If that's the case, of course it can only be *that*.

"You know the idea that two are better than one... While three people are better than two... Right?"

Change finally came to the petrified grounds of Toushouguu.

The first to be sent flying were the worship and main halls at the core of the shrine. As if dynamite had been set off, the worship hall and the main hall collapsed as stone fragments scattered and flew with the sound of explosions.

Next were the Gates of Youmeimon, followed by the divine stable, the five-story pagoda and the first torii.

Explosions occurred one after another. Originally, restoring the entire area petrified by the Great Sage Equaling Heaven was already a monumental task. Even so, seeing the important cultural heritage site destroyed so utterly, Sayanomiya Kaoru could not help exclaiming "oh my, I give up." On the other hand, Amakasu Touma closed his eyes in deep thought as if saying "that's going a bit overboard."

The only one who could watch calmly was Lu Yinghua. Seeing the first torii — namely, the main entrance to Nikkou Toushouguu being demolished, he took into his hands the package he had been keeping on the side all this time.

Then he immediately rushed into the smoke and dust cloud created by the shattered and pulverized stone.

"Master, please get changed. I have brought you a change of clothes here."

"Well done, you have become more attentive. You have earned yourself a little praise."

"Master's praise is too kind, your disciple expresses utmost gratitude."

Towards the figure of the beautiful maiden who appeared from within the white smoke, Lu Yinghua reverently handed over the package.

"—A fish lives in the northern ocean, its name is the *Kun*! The *Kun* is so large, no one knows how many thousands of miles long it is. Transforming into a bird, its name is the *Peng*! The *Peng*'s back is so vast, no one knows how many thousands of miles wide it is. Flying furiously, its wings are like clouds filling up the sky!"[86]

As soon as the mantra was chanted, the ground suddenly became dark, but not because the sunlight was blotted out by clouds.

A giant sacred bird — the golden-winged *Peng* came flying by. In the instant that this bird flew above their heads, the transcendent beauty's figure vanished.

"With this, all the actors have gathered. It won't be very appropriate if we don't go and watch the finale."

"But these special front row seats offer no guarantees for personal safety."

Sayanomiya Kaoru joked around with her subordinate as she nodded in agreement.

Part 2

The giant sacred bird flew over the plains of Senjougahara.

Estimated in proportion to its wingspan, the massive body must have been several hundred meters in size. Stunned, Godou looked up to watch the majestic entry of the sacred bird. This fellow must be carrying the final participant. But still, even if she wanted to travel here, was it really necessary to use such a conspicuous mode of transportation?

The beautiful heavenly maiden suddenly descended from the back of the giant bird, wearing an outfit in the style of a mandarin gown that hugged and accentuated the wondrous curves of her figure.

With mesmerizing lustrous eyes and pristine white teeth, her beauty could only be described as otherworldly.

Drifting through the air and landing upon the ground like a feather, this person was no other but Luo Cuilian.

"Thank you for your patience, Great Sage! As well as my little brother."

Hearing her words, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven questioned :

"Oh? Little brother?"

"Correct. Kusanagi Godou here is the sworn little brother of me, Luo Cuilian. A relationship akin to you and your fellow brothers."

"Haha! But are you able to become as large as us?"

"In that case, we will defeat you all at once, burying your oath of sworn fraternity at the same time..."

The sworn brothers of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven proceeded to issue arrogant instigating remarks.

Zhu Ganglie's eyes, full of lustful desire, stared intently at Luo Hao; standing on the dragon's head, Vaisravana looked gloomy as ever despite his rhetoric; Luo Hao smiled in return with casual composure.

"Hohoho, it's not a bad idea to decide right here which side's sworn siblings are stronger. Wouldn't you agree? Little brother."

"Umm, actually it's not just us two, there's also another participant..."

From Godou's point of view, he was just stating a fact.

But his sworn elder sister, as well as senior along the path of domination, severely glared at him in response.

"Do you intend to spoil the first chance for us siblings to fight in cooperation by inserting this man of suspicious origins!? Foolish! This is a profane insult to me, your elder sister!"

Calling him a man of suspicious origins was quite an unpleasant manner of address.

The one wearing a mask and black cape, dressed up like a theatrical actor and the man in question, whispered softly:

(Oh... Elder sister eh? Having met for mere days and she's already taken such a liking to you... You are truly outstanding in the ways of stealing maiden hearts.)

(Stop saying weird stuff about her taking a liking to me, please shut up for a bit!)

Hearing John Pluto Smith's reply, Godou hastily retorted in defense.

"Anyway, that's how it is. A rare situation with three gods appearing at the same time. If we are down by one person on our side, wouldn't it be shameful?"

"Shameful?"

Luo Cuilian reacted. As expected, her extreme pride meant that she was fiercely sensitive to such insinuations.

If she were to say something like 'victory against superior numbers is an honor in the martial realm' then there would be no room for objection. However, such an argument would be more of a bluff than the result of some twisted logic. Even exalted as Luo Cuilian, her hubris should not be extreme enough to insist on dignity over practicality... At least, that was what Godou hoped.

"If we don't prepare an army with the same formation as our opponents, it seems like there will be a problem with respect."

"I see, that makes a bit of sense. Very well, I will accept your advice and we shall face them with equal numbers. As befitting for great generals and marshals, it is only right for us to lead armies into battle in the spirit of proper martial way... Still, little brother, something about your behavior displeases me."

Luo Hao grumbled as she stared at Godou. What was she trying to say?

"D-Displeased? I don't think I did anything wrong..."

"Of course you are wrong. I am the martial pinnacle, the elder sister whom you should be offering the utmost respect. And how do you address someone of exalted stature like myself? I believe I have already taught you the most appropriate form of address."

Godou could not help but sigh. Does that word really have to be said right now!?

"O, O-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o... Nee-san..."

"You should be calling me 'Onee-sama.' I never expected a little brother with such poor memory. Fine, since it is the proposal of my sworn little brother, I will accept it."

Having spoken, Luo Cuilian turned to the other Campione.

"From my deductions, you must be the American [King]? My family name is Luo, with given name Cuilian and style name Hao.[87] I give you permission to join the ranks of my army in this battle and fight alongside me, Luo Hao."

"What a unique greeting... I, John Pluto Smith, will offer the entirety of my humble services."

Faced with the loftily delivered invitation, the king dressed in black responded effortlessly.

Compared to the two-hundred-year-old demonic cult leader, the age-unspecified young man seemed far more mature. Breathing a sigh of relief, Godou and his two 'fellow kin' stood shoulder-to-shoulder, facing off against the three divine spirits.

The giant three-headed-six-armed Zhu Ganglie.

As well as Vaisravana standing on the raised head of his mount, the dragon of water.

Finally there was the leader of these two gods, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong. Once again he stood upon the golden cloud and ascended, flying high up into the skies. The three versus three decisive battle was about to begin.

"Hohoho, let me pick my opponent first! I choose the transcendent beauty, the godslayer who reminds me of the Moon Goddess! It is most fitting for her to be the opponent of the Marshal Canopy, the great Zhu Ganglie!"

"...Come to think of it, you are the stellar deity that guards the northern sky."

The Ruler of the Martial Realm frowned at the evil gaze of lust being cast upon her.

"When it comes to the companions of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, one of the most notable is the evil-exorcising deity, the Marshal Canopy Zhu Wuneng. From a wild boar to a domestic pig , you are a deity widely known in folklore. In spite of all that, it is most deplorable for you to be reduced to such a shallow and lowly subordinate god."

In Japan, boars were called "inoshishi" while domestic pigs used the kanji "buta" for distinction.

When Godou received knowledge about the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, information was also gained about his subordinate gods.

The Marshal Canopy Zhu Wuneng was once a military god serving the north pole's Great Emperor Ziwei.[88] At the height of his worship, most likely during the time from the Sui to the Song Dynasties, the three-headed-six-armed appearance in full armament was one of the favorite images depicted by artists.

Frequently appearing in novels and plays, in the end he was linked to Zhu Bajie in the *Journey to the West*.

For such a popular deity to be reduced to a lustful pervert like this... Flames erupted from Luo Cuilian's shoulders as if her anger had been lit on fire, manifesting a golden Benevolent King.[89]

A solidly built figure that did not lose in any way to the giant Zhu Ganglie, displaying his impressive musculature half-nude!

"A force is exerted! Great force vanquishes small evil!"

"Hmm woaaah!? What is this monstrous strength?"

Zhu Ganglie was being thrown by the Benevolent King. Exactly in the manner of a shot put, the lustful giant god was propelled through the air into the distance.

Crash! As the landing impact resounded, Luo Cuilian ran with her subordinate Benevolent King towards the fallen giant deity. With great speed unexpected from his massive body, Zhu Ganglie got back up and summoned the weapons for his six arms.

The first pair of hands held a sword and a halberd; the second pair, an axe and a club; the third, a bow and arrows.

With black clothing and black armor, the god with a pig's head clashed with the Benevolent King led by Luo Cuilian and the two giants began to fight.

"O Dragon, annihilate these people — Om vaisravanaye svaha!"

The water suddenly exploded.

As Vaisravana stood on the water dragon, a portion of its dissociated body splashed on the ground. Godou and John Pluto Smith jumped backwards to evade the attack. The water formed powerful currents which were tearing apart the ground of the Senjougahara plains!

Like a blade of water, the liquid sliced through rock and flourishing forests as if they were made of paper. Godou and Smith beside him marveled as they muttered to themselves.

"A demonic deity with Buddhist roots... From his appearance, I originally expected an attack of pure power but he turned out to have such skillful moves."

Vaisravana had an appearance like a demon with a particularly frightful face and ferocious-looking body.

Smith's instincts should have been correct, but it was Vaisravana's gloomy and intellectual aspects that avoided giving others an overly violent impression.

"Since ancient times, Vaisravana was the one who inducted countless Shramana ascetics.[90] However, his earlier incarnation killed people and was a sinful deity that had broken precepts against murder..."

Vaisravana began to laugh to himself as he stood on the dragon's head.

"As the Curtain Lifting General at the Palace of the Great Emperor of the Waters in the celestial realm, the Dragon Kings of the Four Seas were once under my command. What I've shown is simply a minor portion of my old powers..."

"Ah, I recall the Daoist pantheon having categories of Water and Thunder Departments, right?"

The Water Department was in charge of the naval forces in the Daoist celestial realm. Though he did not cheat like Godou through instruction magic, Smith was apparently knowledgeable of myths and legends of foreign countries.

"In that case, let me show off some of my skills... The ruler of the underworld commands, offer to me the black wings that penetrate the heavens! O Sky, thou existest only for me to display the breadth of my magnanimity!"

Smith softly chanted spell words, causing the ground to rumble and shake.

It was quite an intense earthquake. Cracks and crevices appeared on the ground as it trembled violently, while Smith began to transform over the shaking land. The black-clad eccentric turned into a massive black demonic bird.

"Now, properly savor my transformation mystic arts! Will you be able to keep up with me!?"

"What pretentious words! Looks like I am being underestimated !"

Chasing after the rapidly ascending black demonic bird, Vaisravana drove the water dragon flying through the air.

Flying towards the heavens, the black-winged devil king and the mysterious sacred dragon formed from water continued to make their ascent.

However, the ground continued to shake intensely. Most likely, the culprit was the American Campione.

Godou had once heard from Erica that Smith had an authority requiring the offering of [Sacrifices]. This earthquake was most probably one of those sacrifices. The tremors were not too severe, but this continuing series of earthquakes must each have been around 3 or 4 on the Richter scale.

It looked like the earthquakes were going to persist for some time. What a troublesome fellow that Smith guy was!

His irresponsibility of leaving messes behind made Godou a bit stunned as he faced off against the Great Sage Equaling Heaven on the shaking ground.

"Hmm hmm hmph, let us start as well. Are you ready? Kusanagi brat!"

"Fine, come at me with everything you've got, I'm not letting you get out of here in one piece!"

Facing the Great Sage Equaling Heaven who jumped down from the golden cloud, Godou displayed calm composure.

It was a bluff of course, for Godou was completely unprepared. Even though he had that sword, he did not have a usable incarnation able to counter the divine monkey's lightning-fast godly speed. Nevertheless, Godou's fighting spirit was strong as ever, and he intended to snatch victory in his hands even if it meant biting the enemy by the throat.

Wait a minute... Was there really no incarnation that could be used?

There was a strange sense of certainty that he still had an available weapon. This was a very faint feeling of confidence.

Voices telling him to fight could be heard. Voices calling for the defeat of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven. Right, so that is the case now.

Having figured things out, Godou turned his attention to the voices coming from the depths of his body.

Only now did he truly master the ninth incarnation of Verethragna, the [Goat].

This priestly ability converted the thoughts and feelings of the surrounding people into magical power and controlled lightning. During the battle against Marquis Voban, he had once turned the will of the Dead Servants into his power source. But simply gathering willpower was insufficient to use the incarnation freely.

Thanks to being connected to Yuri's psychic sensing, Godou finally understood the true method of using the [Goat].

A king rules by leading the will of the people, thereby raising his own prestige and authority.

Godou extended the tendrils of psychic sensing, traversing the plains of Senjougahara and the area of Okunikkou as well as the Nikkou city streets, mobilizing the hearts and minds of over ten thousand victims.

No mistake about it, this was the consciousness of all the ordinary people who had been forcefully transformed by the Great Sage Equaling Heaven and were now in deep sleep.

These unconscious people originally led peaceful lives but were suddenly turned into monkeys one day, thus entering a nightmare. The sole culprit responsible for these heinous crimes was the [

Heretic God] the Great Sage Equaling Heaven. Even though you people were fortunate enough to be rescued, the Great Sage still stands.

The god who changed you all into monkeys, do you not hold him in contempt?

The god who treated you all as toys, do you not hold anger at him?

Do you not want me to defeat the Great Sage Equaling Heaven!?

Godou used psychic sensing power, entering people's dreams to rouse them, gathering the willpower of the people together, telling them the identity of the true culprit of the incident, fanning the flames of their anger. Lend me your power and believe in me. As long as you lend your power to me, I will definitely help you vanquish that contemptible foe!

He could sense the anger of the unconscious people directed towards the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, forming a swirling vortex of fury in the realm of dreams.

This was exactly what [Goat] needed as a foundation. Godou's left hand was finally able to fire off lightning attacks.

"By the art of spell words I vanquish adherents of injustice and evil! This is the heavenly mandate of victory!"

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven dodged the flash of lightning with great agility.

However, the Great Sage cannot be allowed to do as he pleased any further. Having obtained new power, Godou stared acutely with great intensity at his formidable foe.

Part 3

Using the vast wetlands as the stage, the close-quarter battle resembling a special effects movie was reaching a climax.

Towering at a height of ten-odd metres, there was the three-headed and six-armed Zhu Ganglie.

Then there was the golden Benevolent King as his opponent, a half naked giant with only crude fabric covering his lower torso. The demonic cult leader summoned a spear using Daoist arts and pointed it at Zhu Ganglie. Known as the "King of Weapons" in China, the Qiang[91] or Chinese spear was Luo Cuilian's favorite weapon.

As the two clashed in battle, it was so intense that one would not wish to blink lest a moment is missed.

Each of Zhu Ganglie's six arms held a different weapon.

Sword, halberd, axe, club, bow and arrows. All the weapons were used simultaneously in combination with incredible footwork. He moved everywhere within the vicinity of the

Benevolent King as he continued his attacks. Whenever he distanced himself, he attacked with arrows and the halberd, switching to the sword, axe and club at close range. (As a side note , the halberd refers to a weapon with a shaft like a spear and a sickle-like blade combined together, allowing the spear end to be used for thrusts and the blade for slicing attacks.)

Zhu Ganglie moved so quickly that afterimages were left behind. With such horrifying speed, the five weapons rained attacks down upon the Benevolent King without pause, making the three heads and six arms look like there were thirty heads and sixty arms, or even sixty heads and a hundred and twenty arms.

However, the one who took on this intense barrage of attacks was the demonic cult leader, whose martial arts were simply divine.

Unlike Zhu Ganglie who was circling around in arcs as he attacked, the glorious Benevolent King stood its ground without shifting his position while Luo Hao stood in the center of the circle wielding her spear.

Although there should only be a single spear, it looked like a thousand spearheads were thrusting continuously all at once.

All five of Zhu Ganglie's weapons were intercepted. Arrows were struck down, roaring attacks of the halberd were blocked, the sword was deflected, the axe was sent flying back, and the club was stopped.

As Zhu Ganglie maneuvered in an oval arc to the Benevolent King's back, Luo Hao extended the spear backwards without even turning her head — in other words, the blunt end of the spear blocked every single attack from behind.

"Hohoho, surely you cannot defeat me with this shabby-looking avatar without committing yourself to mutual destruction. I don't mind if you surrender here for I shall give your pure and pristine complexion a good loving..."

The Divine Marshal made a lewd smile as he paused his movements.

Up to this point, attack initiative had been firmly in his control. Though Luo Cuilian disrupted every single one of his attacks with her godlike techniques, she was purely defending. She seemed too occupied with fending off the five weapons' continuous attacks to mount a counterattack.

However, Luo Cuilian frowned and spoke:

"Marshal, your foolishness knows no bounds. True, you have displayed the courageous might of the Divine Marshal serving the North Pole's Great Emperor Ziwei, but at the same time I have completely seen through you. You are no match for me at all. The one who ought to beg for mercy should be... You instead, the Marshal Canopy Zhu Ganglie."

"Ha! What nonsense you speak!"

"Do you seriously believe that? I have already discerned your true abilities. For one to expect a fellow like you to match me, Luo Hao, in a one-on-one duel, what an embarrassment!"

For some reason, her defiant words made all three faces of the three-headed six-armed war god turn pale.

And then the demonic cult leader dispelled the Benevolent King .

"Using three-headed six-armed martial arts is certainly extraordinary, but as the Ruler of the Martial Realm, Luo Hao will defeat you in a frontal confrontation as befits a king. Now, come at me with everything you have!"

Even when her opponent was a god, she maintained her supercilious airs as usual.

This was the truth of Luo Cuilian's abilities. Such was the grandiloquence delivered by the unarmed Ruler of the Martial Realm.

Meanwhile, John Pluto Smith and Vaisravana were battling in midair.

The sun had already come up. This was a refreshing morning sky and even a great sunny day. Flying through the air, Smith penetrated the blue sky and hovering clouds as Vaisravana pursued behind the demonic bird, standing on the head of the water dragon.

Vairavana had a material body, but nevertheless, he fearlessly accelerated without any regard for G-forces in flying. As befitted a god with a body incomparably resilient beyond mortals, or perhaps he was using some sort of protective spell?

"Eight hundred perish in the quicksands, three thousand drown in deep waters. May swan feathers never float again, and reed flowers sink to the depths!"

Vairavana chanted spell words, causing clouds to gather in the sky.

The clouds shaped themselves into a long slender form, with a shining radiant surface and transparent interior. Soon after, it took on the likeness of a dragon, gathering clouds and moisture in the air, another water dragon had been formed.

This continued beyond a single dragon as more water dragons were born in rapid succession. Including the original that Vaisravana was riding, there was now a total of nine dragons.

"Oh? You're not bad at all."

In his demonic bird form, Smith offered mild praise.

The nine water dragons slithered and exchanged positions continuously, widening their ferocious jaws and performing biting attacks.

Smith dodged with skillful flying for the black demonic bird not only possessed speed but also extraordinary agility. However, it

was still unable to evade every attack. As the long neck of one of the water dragons brushed past one wing, the masked king finally felt true fear.

The wing did not suffer a simple scratch but was cut opened and bleeding. Was this the same effect as the blade of water witnessed earlier on the ground?

It was as if the water dragons' bodies were made of blades, and they had the power to rip apart everything they touched.

"Oh my... Do I have to gamble my life away for a dance invitation!?"

Due to the wing injury, it was impossible to fly properly. Nevertheless, the black demonic bird did not need to flap its wings to fly.

Smith ascended rapidly on wind currents and then swiftly descended. Like a swallow gliding on sea breezes, Smith nimbly flew back and forth, evading the wave-like water blade attacks made by the dragon heads.

Naturally, Smith did not expect to escape that easily.

"Smoking mirror, symbol of Tezcatlipoca!"

From Smith's jet black wings, out spewed smoke that wrapped itself around the bodies of the water dragons.

Inhaling this smoke would cause poisoning that produces a paralyzing effect on magical power. For ordinary enemies, this was enough to weaken them for easy pickings...

"Thousands of evil, tens of thousands of filth! May all be cleansed by water!"

Not to be outdone, Vaisravana chanted spell words in turn, causing steam to be emitted from the bodies of the nine water dragons, purifying the gray magical smoke. This was purifying divine power that dispelled magical corruption.

However, Smith was not going to be outdone either, and he opened the beak of the demonic bird.

A magic bullet was fired from its mouth, aiming straight at Vaisravana's body! It was targeting the blue-black demonic deity riding on the head of one of the flying water dragons.

With a god as its target, Artemis' flash of light sped off. At that moment, another water dragon rushed into the trajectory of the magic bullet, getting its head impaled instead of its creator and disappearing without trace.

However, the attack of the magic bullet did not end there, and continued to fly towards Vaisravana!

Water dragons continually rushed to intercept it, and were dispelled one after another.

The water dragon carrying Vaisravana was the only one remaining. In order to protect Vaisravana, the last water dragon transformed into a shield — and deflected the bullet. Somehow, the body of the water dragon had solidified into ice.

Deflected by the ice dragon, the magic bullet flew away into the distant sky.

"Hohoho... Finally, ice to deflect that bullet has been created."

Vaisravana laughed with a gloomy face.

His mount, the water dragon had frozen into ice, transforming into an ice dragon.

No — that was not all. Using the moisture in the atmosphere, new ice dragons were being created, and the ranks of the army of nine dragons were filled once more!

Smith opened the demonic bird's beak and shot another magic bullet.

However, the attack he fired was again deflected by an ice dragon, disappearing into the distance opposite to the previous bullet.

"Hmph... A mirror of ice with the magic of reflection? What troublesome divine power, but it may very well create a good opportunity."

Despite the ineffectiveness of his trump cards, Smith spoke in a relaxed manner.

"Oh? What do you mean?"

"Because there is something that has intrigued me for quite some time... For gods like you, strength and divine authority is not always proportional to how well-known you are, and there are times when minor gods show greater resilience than half-assed major gods. What is the cause of such disparity... I believe that now is a good opportunity to find out."

The ninth incarnation, the [Goat], had the power to control thunder and lightning.

However, the target must be a common enemy recognized by the people and there was the major caveat of taking the life force of nearby people indiscriminately. Godou recalled his memories from the last time he used this incarnation and released a thunderstrike.

A flash of lightning was fired from his right hand, giving off the stench of ozone from the ionized air as the intense electrical current headed straight for the Great Sage Equaling Heaven. At the same time, Godou did not forget to direct his awareness towards the sky.

Thunderclouds were summoned into the sunny sky, and these heavy clouds rumbled with thunder.

"Damn it, all this static electricity is annoying!"

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven grumbled with displeasure as he dodged lightning coming from in front and above at the same time.

Normally, being struck by lightning would cause severe burns and a massive shockwave impact. However, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven's iron body was a conductor. Though he was blown back, there was apparently no damage.

Whenever the Great Sage Equaling Heaven approached and tried to attack with his Ruyi Staff, Godou released lightning at him .

The Great Sage was struck by lightning many times and blown away backwards, but clearly did not suffer any injuries. Bodies of steel were truly destestable.

"Damn it! This is neverending — may the heavens shake and the earth tremble in fear, hurry hurry!"

The 160cm tall divine monkey roughly doubled in height. Naturally, his other dimensions were increased proportionately.

Enduring Godou's lightning, he spread his legs and forcefully stood his ground.

The expanded body could now withstand the impact of the lightning without being sent flying. The Great Sage smiled with his monkey face as he charged forward. Who could have expected him to use body expansion to resist the impact of lightning!?

"Damn it! In that case—"

Godou gathered electrical energy into spheres and created balls of thunder.

Roughly the size of basketballs, these small spheres continuously emitted electricity. Then Godou threw them at the Great Sage Equaling Heaven. Not one, but five at the same time!

"Hmm oooooh, what clever little tricks!"

The five thunder balls released electrical current as they violently crashed into the Great Sage Equaling Heaven. This was the strategy of overcoming giant enemies with numbers. Suddenly, the divine monkey returned to his original size and jumped away sideways.

At the same time, he repeatedly used the spell of creating clones —

Multiplying to over twenty of himself, the Great Sages jumped at Godou all at the same time.

"Evil people can never hit me!"

Godou summoned lightning which descended from the thundercloud, surrounding himself in 360 degrees with lightning for protection.

The stench of ionized air stifled his nostrils, while the attacking Great Sages were all swept away by the lightning — no, just as he was thinking that, the divine monkey with peerless agility descended from above.

Using his clones as distractions, the real one had jumped into the air.

The Ruyi Staff was swung down hard, and Godou evaded by rolling on the ground.

Returning to his original position, Kusanagi Godou faced off against the Great Sage Equaling Heaven once again.

His enemy's attacks came with far too much variety. What kind of surprise tactics could be used to defeat him? Just as Godou felt troubled, his right arm began to hurt.

It was telling Godou to rely on it. Time to display a man's dignity.

Godou snorted in response.

"Like the time in the Netherworld, what a meddlesome fellow... But anyway, I will accept this battle plan!"

Godou extended his right arm at the Great Sage Equaling Heaven.

"Tsk... You retard, are you firing noisy lightning again?"

"Nope, this time is a little different. Lightning doesn't have much of an effect on your steel body... I'm going to show you something more amazing!"

The Great Sage grumbled in disappointment. But if this move worked, victory definitely belonged to Kusanagi Godou! What would be the end result?

"As the one who holds all victory in my hands, I am the strongest. All enemies shall meet defeat by my hand!"

Composing the spell words, the sacred warlord's authority and the divine sword's power began to amplify each other.

No mistake about it, this was the divine blade Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's power!

—The sword that assimilated the qualities of rebellious barbarians to bolster its own power. It was now Kusanagi Godou's personal sword, able to absorb divine power that damaged its master, converting it into its own energy. In the battle against Luo Cuilian, it had absorbed the [Dragon's Roar and Tiger's Howl] and provided the final decisive strike.

Furthermore, there was another interesting use for this sword.

"As the embodiment of victory, all enemies shall tremble before me!"

Lightning was summoned from the thundercloud, descending onto his right arm which contained the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi. Another use of this sword was to absorb Kusanagi Godou's authority, creating new powers!

"I shall smash through all enemies in my way! Man and devil — all enemies, all who harbor enmity will be vanquished!"

The dormant divine sword in his arm absorbed the lightning, converting it into another power — releasing magnetism.

In ancient Japan, blacksmithing began with the step of melting ironsand followed by forging the resulting steel sword. Anyway, the point was that ancient Japanese swords were made from ironsand — the ore of a ferromagnetic metal.

When ferromagnetic ores were struck by lightning in nature, magnetism was occasionally induced.

Godou and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi were recreating this phenomenon, using massive electric and magnetic fields, together with the already present steel —

Thus a miracle could be performed — !

"Go forth, Great Sage Equaling Heaven! Fly away to the ends of the universe!"

"Woah... W-What is this power!?"

This effect was created using the magnetic fields given off by a massive flow of electrical current, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's mystic techniques, and ferromagnetic iron.

The properties of magnets meant two possible outcomes, will they mutually attract or repel? The resulting magnetic field used the latter to make a bullet — the Great Sage Equaling Heaven was sent flying away.

The divine monkey with the indestructible body of steel was trapped by the magnetic field released from Godou's right arm, and kept flying up in the air.

Like a rocket taking off to outer space, he flew with horrific speed towards the skies.

Railguns used electromagnetism to accelerate an object and fire it at super high speeds. Using this principle to create a mass driver to fire off massive objects into space, Kusanagi Godou's authority from Verethragna combined with Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi to create a makeshift mass driver to send the divine monkey of steel into the heavens!

The earth's atmosphere is composed of the layers of the troposphere, the stratosphere, the mesosphere and the thermosphere.

Beyond the thermosphere is the exosphere and then space. If this continued, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven would be exiled from earth. Furthermore, objects flying at high speed will get

heated by friction with the atmosphere, resulting in extremely high temperatures. The last region of the atmosphere — the thermosphere was a super high temperature realm that reached two thousand degrees.

Now that all the necessary conditions for defeating this formidable enemy had been gathered, what would be the final outcome...!?

Part 4

Rising through the air, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven had become a burning bullet.

Though he was well accustomed to god speed movement, this was the first time he experienced this method of acceleration.

In reality, so-called god speed was not really the power of 'rapid movement' but an ability to shorten travel duration. Rather than ' moving from Point A to Point B at the speed of several hundred kilometres per hour,' it was the ability of 'moving from Point A to Point B in zero point something seconds.' Instead of physical acceleration, it was the power of distorting the traveling time required.

Which is why the Great Sage had yet another first experience, that of the friction of air resistance at supersonic speeds and the heat from plowing through the atmosphere.

"So hot hot hot hot hot hot! This is unbearable! What a godslayer, this is too reckless!"

It was imperative to return to the surface before incinerating completely. He activated his divine power and tried to counteract the electromagnetic forces.

Also calling for his golden cloud, he had to hurry back to ground level by any means possible. The many phenomena sustaining the planet, such as gravity and the earth's own magnetic field, could also be used to return him to the surface.

"Middle Bro and Lil' Bro! Combine your powers, you two! Summon me back to earth!"

Even separated by tens of thousands of miles, the sworn brothers could still communicate telepathically.

However, beyond the Great Sage's expectations, the sworn younger brothers had both been driven into crises of their own.

"When Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva was practicing the profound prajna paramita, he illuminated the five skandhas and saw that they are all empty, and he crossed beyond all suffering and difficulty. Shariputra, form does not differ from emptiness; emptiness does not differ from form. Form itself is emptiness; emptiness itself is form!"[92]

Luo Cuilian began to recite the Heart Sutra.

Combined with the melodious voice of the maiden who attained nirvana, the authority of the [Dragon's Roar and Tiger's Howl] generated shockwaves of magical wind.

Magical power was originally something with neither shape, color, odor nor form, but Luo Cuilian's authority conferred various properties upon it.

"So, too, are feeling, cognition, formation, and consciousness. Shariputra, all dharmas are empty of characteristics. They are not produced. Not destroyed, not defiled, not pure, and they neither increase nor diminish!"

The air currents continued to expand as the power of the wind increased once again.

"Tsk! A mere woman doing such infuriating things!"

As Luo Cuilian concentrated in some kind of terrifying undertaking, Zhu Ganglie brandished his five weapons.

Firing arrows and attacking continuously with the halberd, sword, axe and club, he tried to resist the impacts of the magical wind.

The three-headed six-armed giant god was helpless against the magical wind blowing in the cult leader's surroundings. This was the wind that could have swept away all of creation, and the Divine Marshal's weapons were powerless in their efforts to breach the gaseous defensive wall that barred all attacks. There was simply no way to disrupt the transcendent beauty as she composed a song of death and destruction.

"Make haste, by the mighty decree of the North Emperor, obey!"

Zhu Ganglie chanted spell words to bolster his bodily strength and was finally able to budge his weapons gradually, inching with great sluggishness towards Luo Cuilian's body. However, the demonic cult leader's mystic arts finally completed at this time.

Infusing light into the magical wind, Luo Cuilian's body shone with golden light that melded with the wind.

This was also an avatar manifested from the [Divine Might of Vajrapani] but not one of the golden Benevolent Kings. The brightness gathered and took form between Luo Cuilian and Zhu Ganglie, finally becoming a massive palm!

My heart is as the void, but my palm is like a deadly hurricane —

"Mmmmmmmmmaaaaaaah!"

"Strength exerted from bones, force applied from tendons! Yes, a palm that precedes all creation!"

The golden palm was the same size as Zhu Ganglie's massive body. This giant palm performed the subsequent attack.

Like an explosion — the three-headed six-armed giant deity suffered a frontal assault, devastating his face, body and legs, giving his brain a concussion, the impacts penetrating his internal organs and shattering his bones.

The giant golden palm even grabbed Zhu Ganglie and held tight with great force.

"My sworn little brother seems to have exiled the Great Sage Equaling Heaven. As his elder sister, I think it would be interesting to imitate him and follow suit. Vulgar war god, disappear into the sky! Your presence is an affront to my eyes!"

Despite engaging in battle along the front lines, she did not neglect awareness of the entire battlefield.

This was the rare talent displayed by the clairvoyant Daoist priestess.

As she struck her palm towards the heavens, the mighty golden palm kept Zhu Ganglie in its tight grasp and sent him up towards the sky.

"Woaaaaaaah!"

As Zhu Ganglie screamed pitifully as he ascended, his hollow cries resounded across the sky.

"...Amazing, it's hard to believe that the monstrous strength of Her Eminence was capable of such a thing."

The golden palm and Zhu Ganglie were rocketing up into the sky.

Witnessing this surreal scene, Godou felt deeply impressed. What had taken a makeshift railgun created by him and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, the same effect was achieved by the demonic cult leader through brute strength and martial arts alone.

Godou made his way over to where Luo Hao had been fighting.

Making his way torturously over the shaking ground, the destination lying before him had become a wasteland. Standing in the center was the beautiful demonic cult leader, who had apparently used her magical wind authority to render this entire area into ruins.

"Little brother, you have arrived. Just as you witnessed, your elder sister has just exiled the vulgar Marshal Canopy. I was watching as you defeated the Great Sage Equaling Heaven. Very well done."

She was praising me. Looks like she used some sort of vision enhancing magic.

Though he was being praised, Godou found Luo Cuilian's gaze to be very severe.

"However I seemed to have heard you muttering to yourself... Calling me something like 'Her Eminence,' using such an impersonal form of address like entertaining a guest... I wondered if I heard wrongly..."

Stared at like being interrogated, Godou could not help trembling. Could she actually have heard his exclamation from when he saw Zhu Ganglie rise to the heavens? What was with this supernatural hearing?!

"Just to make sure, I will remind you once more. Little brother, call me 'Onee-sama'."

"O-o-o... o... Nee... sama..."

Urged by her, Godou had no choice but to do as told, but still the great elder sister shook her head.

"This is no good at all. The elder sister beyond the equal of mere mortals, filled with incomparable mercy and benevolence... Basks you in her light like the sun that warms the world. Your manner of address just now did not carry the slightest hint of respectful admiration. You should be calling me 'Onee-sama' with worship and adoration. You have to work harder on this."

The level of those requirements are too high... The subject needs to be changed, quick!

"B-By the way, O... Nee-san looked like the battle wasn't too tough."

"Of course, although that Zhu Ganglie is the True Lord Marshal Canopy, he is merely manifesting in the manner of a subordinate god."

Godou's failure in addressing her in the prescribed manner made the elder sister frown.

However, she forgave him for now. Being called 'Nee-san' was enough to provide her with slight satisfaction.

"Remember this well. What decides the strength of [Heretic Gods], is neither how great or powerful they were in the original myths, nor how widespread is their fame. The key to their strength lies in their unshakable ego."

Unshakable ego. In other words, the characteristic of steadfast narcissism?

"Relying on no one's opinions but their own, going forward to do what one wishes no matter what — the willpower to destroy the human race even if it means changing the heavens and the earth. This determines a god's strength. Nevertheless, subordinate gods cannot sustain their existence if the main deity is gone."

Godou recalled what happened with Verethragna, Athena and the Great Sage Equaling Heaven.

Once the amnesiac sacred warlord retrieved his true ego, his power greatly increased; the Greek virgin goddess Athena became the powerful ancient earth mother deity once she retrieved the Gorgoneion; having lost his name and mettle, the divine monkey monarch descended upon the earth as the great hero once the seal was released.

This explains everything, I see now... Godou could not help but nod as he accepted the facts.

"So by this time, Vaisravana who is fighting Smith should also... "

"If I'm not mistaken, he has the current advantage, however..."

Luo Cuilian looked up into the sky with a sharp gaze.

"Subordinate gods receive protection from the master while the master in turn obtains support from the subordinates. They will become even more powerful and formidable. It would not be wrong to say the battle truly begins now, my little brother, you must not lose your guard by any means."

Come to think of it, the reason why I defeated with such ease the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, which now lies dormant in my right hand, was because its master Susanoo lived in the Netherworld and did not show any concern for the battle. Without such auspicious circumstances, what would have been the outcome?

"As expected for gods who suffer from a lack of distinct ego, even if they are able to make full use of their powers, they are missing the kind of tenacious power that overcomes stalemates and losing situations. Dare I say, this is exactly as I imagined it?"

"Gah... How could this be! Clearly I was able to block these arrows just now—!"

Riding upon the wind in the form of the demonic bird was John Pluto Smith.

He circled leisurely in the sky as he looked down upon Vaisravana whose chest had been penetrated by a blue-white

magic bullet. Had it been a normal human, it would have pierced the heart.

"If you were an actual independent deity, surely you would have evaded the returning Artemis' Arrow. Anyway, thank you for proving my suspicions correct."

The two bullets deflected by the ice dragons a while ago had been flying towards the depths of the universe high above the world. But along the way, they made a U-turn and returned to earth. The ice dragons gathered together, overlapping to form a shield, intending to deflect the bullets again and managed to block one of them. However, the remaining shot could not be stopped and Vaisravana was pierced directly...

These were the magic bullets of the moon deity, limited to only six shots per lunar cycle. This was the reason why every shot had such horrific power. It was rumored that if all the bullets were shot at once, the resulting fire would devour the entirety of California and burn for seven days without extinguishing. After the incineration, it would become such a complete wasteland that even weeds would not grow.

Against such a powerful weapon, mere deflection was not going to neutralize its attacks. Vaisravana's defeat had already been sealed by the fact that he was unable to destroy the bullets directly like the Great Sage Equaling Heaven.

"Ooh— since it has come to this!"

From the top of an ice dragon's head, the punctured Vaisravana released a water current from his hand, naturally his target was the black demonic bird flying in the air. Smith boldly performed a defensive maneuver against this counterattack.

"How sad, your death struggle is meaningless, and only serves as a chance for me to show off my powers."

The attacked devil king released his transformation in the air.

The black demonic bird returned to the black-clad black-masked John Pluto Smith.

Due to the instantaneous decrease in body size, Vaisravana's attack passed through directly without hitting anything. The caped devil king fluttered in the wind like a feather, and pulled out his gun, aiming at Vaisravana as he descended.

"Wah— !"

This time the abdomen was penetrated, causing Vaisravana to collapse. Of the six magic bullets, only one remained, but having defeated one of the three deities, it was enough—

As he slowly descended towards the ground, Smith suddenly heard the resounding voice of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven.

"Middle Bro and Lil' Bro! Combine your powers, you two! Summon me back to earth!"

"Big Bro, I got it! I will entrust all my remaining strength to you! It is now time for the three gods to unite and vanquish the Rakshasa!"

What!? Before Smith's surprised eyes, the Curtain Lifting General Vaisravana's figure dispersed, becoming tiny sand-like particles of light which flew towards the high atmosphere.

Flying high towards the heavens, the Marshal Canopy Zhu Ganglie was accompanied by the golden palm.

He too, heard the voice of his sworn older brother, and decided to surrender as well.

"Hmm what a pity. Booze, gambling, women, breasts, butts, beautiful legs! There is still so much that I want to do! But in my current unsightly state, there is nothing else I can do! Big Bro, I am coming now!"

Clutched tightly by the golden palm, Zhu Ganglie's body also dispersed, forming the same shining particles of light like the youngest sworn brother and escaping from the confines of the hand to fly towards the corner of the sky where the sworn older brother was located!

Turned into a railgun projectile and flying towards space, the divine monkey, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong, proceeded to chant a mantra with calm composure.

"Dubhe, Merak, Phecda, Megrez, Alioth, Mizar, Alkaid! The Seven Stars of the Northern Dipper, I beseech you to manifest!"

As the divine essence of the subordinate gods rushed over to him, the Great Sage absorbed it to raise his own divine power.

"Snakes and dragons, offer your bloody carcasses to me; flames, heat up iron to forge into steel; clear water, cool the sword's blade! All shall empower my divinity as the sword god!"

In order to attain an unshakable ego, the Great Sage was returning to his roots as a sword god.

In order to form a sword, he gathered the power he needed.

The devil kings attacking me and the Rakshasa tearing me apart ! The Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong, was now about to enter the path of hellish trials to become the divine sword that vanquishes evil and embodies justice! Overwhelming power filled his heart and mind.

Once again confirming his mission as a sword god, he expressed approval of the ancient covenant.

"Hah—!"

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven finally released himself from the cursed bonds of electromagnetism.

As he overlooked the territory of Japan, he summoned his Ruyi Staff.

It was finally time for a counterattack. Smiling, he grew in size, letting his body reach the dimensions of Zhu Ganglie. Though he was able to expand further, making his body too large would be detrimental to speed.

Next in action were the two sworn younger brothers who had hurried over.

Zhu Ganglie's essence turned into a massive black boar, roughly the same size as the current Great Sage who sat on his back, taking on the role of a wild beast mount.

Then Vaisravana's essence formed a dragon, wrapping itself around the back of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, taking on a ready stance that seemed like it was going to attack on command.

Thus, the three gods became one, and everything was ready.

The three divine spirits' bodies were enveloped by white flames as they fell back onto the surface like a shooting star.

Veering off from the direction of Nikkou, they had to correct their trajectory along the way while being surrounded by high heat, passing through the stratosphere and finally returning to the troposphere.

The ground beneath could now be seen. Nantaisan, Lake Chuuzenji, Senjougahara, Lake Yunoko, etc —

Along the way, the black demonic bird's silhouette could be spotted in the distance.

One of the godslayers was trying to pursue me. Excellent, let's strike him down.

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven descended upon the land of Senjougahara once more.

However, this time the massive landing impact remodeled the landscape. Riding astride the black boar, leading the dragon, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven's mighty entry made the ground crack and overturn, blowing away soil and vegetation, creating a crater.

At the bottom of the crater, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven lightly kicked the beast's abdomen, ordering it to make its way to the surface.

The black demonic bird also came and landed, transforming into the man dressed in black. On ground level, the team of the young man and woman was also heading over here.

"So, godslayers, let us fight to the very end!"

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven shouted at the mortal enemies before him with great delight.

Thus the three Campiones faced off against the three gods who had united as one.

Godou was still maintaining the [Goat] incarnation, whose priestly power informed him that the Great Sage Equaling Heaven had become three gods in one.

Taking on the role of a horse was the giant black boar transformed from Zhu Ganglie.

Vaisravana had become a dragon, its long and slender body slithering along the Great Sage's back.

And then the steel monkey of Scythian origins wielded the Ruyi Staff, like a knight in a jousting tournament except with unusual body measurements, a bizarre knight standing ten-odd metres tall.

The fur on Great Sage Equaling Heaven's two arms stood on end and were fired like rockets.

As countless hairs flew through the air, their front ends were sharp as needles. These things could probably pierce right through a steel plate!

"...This is bad!"

Godou could not help crying out as the kings scattered and the needles struck the ground. Anyone who gets hit would be skewered! And that was just the first wave of attacks.

Firing in succession, the needles formed a hail of projectiles that blotted the sky.

"Quoted from the chapter of *Carefree Roaming*, the perfect man has no thought of self; the god-like man, none of merit; the sagely-minded man, none of fame!"[93]

With the sound of Luo Cuilian's melodious chant, the impact of magical wind blew away thousands of needles, but at the same time, the three gods in one also made their move.

Crash! The ground shook as the black boar carrying the Great Sage Equaling Heaven began to gallop, charging and racing. That kind of speed was like the wind. Despite the huge size of its body, its movements were faster than the eye could see.

"One who slices everything apart, be summoned for the sake of victory!"

Godou tried to counterattack, again using lightning and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi to generate massive magnetic forces, intending to send the Great Sage into space once more, but because the Great Sage had vastly increased his mass, an immediate effect could not be produced. No good, it's too late!

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven was arriving on the giant boar .

As the boar raised its hooves to trample Godou, Luo Cuilian and Smith, there was clearly no time to use the railgun.

"Massive timber splitting mountains, producing great force! Stacking multitudes of golden bells, producing impenetrable iron cloth!"

The demonic cult leader charged at this time.

From her back drifted a flaming aura which took form as the golden Benevolent King, blocking the beast's charge. What amazing peerless arm strength! However at this instant, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven leaped from the boar's back.

"Hah—!"

Somersaulting to behind the Benevolent King, he used the Ruyi Staff to strike at the golden back.

Ooof! The Benevolent King's courageous expression was distorted, but he still kicked backwards at the Great Sage Equaling Heaven behind him. However, this kick was easily avoided, and the Ruyi Staff once again roared as it whistled through the air.

Smack smack smack smack smack! The rapid series of impacts sounded like fireworks.

With the sound of explosions, the Great Sage had made a continuous series of at least a hundred strikes in an instant. Completely unable to fight back, the Benevolent King was struck by a decisive blow from the Great Sage, and the golden half-nude male was dispelled without trace.

At this time, a black shadow flew up from the ground.

This was the black demonic bird transformed from John Pluto Smith again.

He must be thinking that a ground battle's outcome might be uncertain? However, it looked like there was something chasing after the ferocious flying bird.

It was the serpentine creature that had been standing ready on the Great Sage's back — the dragon.

Flying with the same speed as the demonic bird, the dragon blocked the bird's path from in front, preventing Smith from flying freely.

Somehow, the giant boar had also jumped high into the sky, was it trying to attack the demonic bird together with the dragon? But the height of this jump could not reach the position of the demonic bird, and only arrived a position slightly below where the dragon and the bird battled —

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven also jumped at this time.

Jumping nimbly as if flying with wings, one could not connect it with the weight of the giant body at all.

Wielding the Ruyi Staff, the divine monkey's target was the giant boar in the air. Using the boar's fur as a foothold, he made another giant leap, and so the Great Sage Equaling Heaven reached the altitude where the demonic bird and the dragon were fighting.

The Ruyi Staff was swung.

Aaaaaaaah! Struck in the neck, the demonic bird screamed in pain and crashed towards the ground.

"Uh... As befitting of the Great Sage... I am faced with a difficult battle..."

Before Godou, Luo Cuilian had been brought down to one knee.

Blood dripped out from her mouth, and it seemed like the damage suffered by the Benevolent King was reflected onto her body.

"Wait a moment and I will proceed to use all of my divine powers, defeating the three-in-one Great Sage... Godou, watch and learn carefully from the heroic fighting form of your elder sister, got that?"

Even though injured, she still wanted to stand up and fight for victory.

Amongst Campiones, Luo Cuilian's fighting spirit and willpower were typical of the illegitimate children of the fool — Epimetheus, whose talent was possessing insanity that transcended strategy and victory probability.

Maybe she really could win this fight.

Perhaps she could turn this crisis around alone.

But this won't do! Godou shook his head, for 'perhaps' was simply not good enough.

I want to win, and will do everything to achieve it myself. Within the plans of victory traced out in Godou's mind, the power of this woman and the fallen young man were needed.

"—Nee-san."

For the very first time, Godou was able to use this manner of address naturally.

"How many times have I repeated, you should be calling me ' Onee-sama.' How forgetful of you..."

"Nee-san, this sort of thing is irrelevant at this time. In order to defeat that bastard monkey, the three of us must cooperate together. Don't say anything about fighting alone again."

Godou gazed directly into the maiden's eyes, speaking his mind in earnest.

"Besides, Nee-san is the one who said this is the first time for us to fight in cooperation, perhaps you have forgotten? I will definitely end this battle with victory, so I will use everything at my disposal. So come, fight together with me, this is my request of a lifetime!"

"W-When did you start becoming so obsessed with this battle?"

If that's the case, you should have spoken earlier. Luo Cuilian nodded as she blushed.

"Very well, fulfilling the little brother's willfulness is also part of a sworn elder sister's duty. I will not object. In the name of the bonds between us, this battle must be won no matter what!"

Godou gave simple instructions to the assenting elder sister.

When forming impromptu teams without sufficient time to get accustomed to one another, it was necessary to keep things simple.

During his baseball days, Godou had many opportunities to train and compete with representative teams. Furthermore, as the catcher whose position was central to defense, he was used to making this kind of duty distribution.

"The root of my power of Vajra, now is the time for great might that can tear apart heaven and earth!"

Hearing the summons of the demonic cult lady, the Om pair of golden Benevolent Kings manifested.

As the vanguard she was to use her full strength, hence the simultaneous use of dual avatars.

—Prior to the advent of firearms, the combat potential of cavalry was equivalent to tanks in modern warfare.

This was due to an absolute advantage in both offensive ability and mobility, because riding horses traveled faster than on foot,

and attacking on a galloping horse carried the benefit of much greater momentum. Furthermore, with bows and arrows as well as other factors such as outstanding cavalry tactics, many equestrian tribes conquered vast territories in both the orient and the occident .

And now in the present, the enormous Great Sage Equaling Heaven was riding a giant boar charging on the plains of Senjougahara.

Facing them were the two Benevolent Kings approaching on foot. For infantry to be able to counter the historically proven principle of cavalry superiority, the demonic cult leader's martial might was truly astounding.

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven charged forward, riding the giant boar.

Blocking him was the open-mouthed[94] Benevolent King, but the wild boar attempted to thrust its sharp tusks at the flank of his abdomen.

The close-mouthed Benevolent King used his open-mouthed partner as a platform to launch an attack at the divine monkey riding the black boar. Jumping lightly into the air he made a series of killing palm strikes.

However, all of them were blocked by the Ruyi Staff.

The dragon lying in wait on the Great Sage's back, also bared its fangs as it opened its jaws to bite the throat of the open-mouthed Benevolent King.

While all this was happening, the giant boar below did not stop charging, and was competing in a battle of strength against the incomparable might of the Benevolent King. The open-mouthed one's muscles bulged as he halted the advance of the giant boar.

Like a mounted knight, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven swung down his staff, striking the open-mouthed Benevolent King soundly in the face.

The open-mouthed Benevolent King persevered but was clearly at a disadvantage. Using the time bought, Godou concentrated on raising his magical power.

Due to the enemy's abnormal size, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi needed to be infused with power to reach a critical point.

However, there were still other tasks required during this time, hence Godou approached the fallen young man.

The place the demonic bird crashed down just now was close by . Crouched down on the grass, the masked king was struggling to stand up.

"Are you unable to fight any longer?"

"In terms of boxing, this is as if the knockout count reached eight. Still, I can just barely pull myself together, enough to let me give a miraculous reversal performance."

Still eloquent as ever, then he must be fine. Godou had no intention of extending a helping hand for the man trying to stand up because John Pluto Smith did not ask for his help.

Several seconds later, the two of them stood shoulder to shoulder and smiled at each other. Although Smith's face was obscured by the mask he wore, surely he must be showing a fearless smile.

That's right, that was the kind of man he was.

"You are concentrating magical power as if preparing for some interesting operation. By my guess, Her Eminence is buying time for you right now... Hmm, how unexpected for her to have a personality that dutifully supports a man with such profound devotion."

"Stop saying these weird things. Ignoring that, I am currently preparing to use this move."

Trying to silence Smith's nonsense, Godou told him the essential details.

"However, the one to perform the finishing blow has to be you. Previously you mentioned a trump card with heat and fire, can you still use it?"

"Don't worry, I am not a man who misses out on rare opportunities for a grand performance. It's ready any time... So... what are you planning?"

Hearing the plan Godou was considering, Smith whistled from beneath the mask.

Wiggling his index and middle fingers in a pretentious manner to substitute for a response — it seemed to be saying, what a reckless proposal, but count me in.

The black-caped young man departed with shaking footsteps, but Godou was not worried in the least.

If this man had already said he was ready any time, then he won't be embarrassing himself. Hence Godou raised his right arm towards the sky in preparation.

"It was this place, that Susanoo led a thousand unruly deities in rebellion — intending to take over this country!"

Was this his second authority or simply just a weapon? In order to summon the sword with the ambiguous identity, Godou recited spell words.

If it was just an authority, it should be minding its own business instead of interfering during strange occasions. If it was just a weapon, it was buried too deeply inside Godou. Was this problem the result of the chaotic conditions under which this fellow was defeated?

"A thousand swords standing upon the earth, used as city walls to defend against the enemies..."

...Well said, you can just call me 'partner.' Hearing the whispers coming from the depths of his right arm, Godou nodded. This form of address blurred the distinction between the two identities, and was not a bad name.

"So, let's go, partner — Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, unsheathe!"

Neither an ability nor a possession, it was the summoning of a companion.

Responding gallantly was the cooperative companion who might one day decline to help on whim.

'Here! Namely, the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi! The steel that breaks a thousand blades!'

The divine sword Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi was finally unsheathed from its scabbard!

The silver-white light concentrated on the right arm raised towards the heavens, for the sword that stole and assimilated rebellious barbaric might, imitating what was used against the [Dragon's Roar and Tiger's Howl] in Luo Cuilian's battle, was going to be used for the decisive strike.

In that case, the target this time was of course the power of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong — the authority of steel !

The silver-white light materialized above Godou's head, forming a silver-white metallic ring.

This iron ring was made of the same steel as the Great Sage... If one were to give it a name, of course it would be most fitting to call it the [Constricting Circlet], right? That was the Buddhist treasure that Avalokitasvara bestowed upon the Monk Sanzang to keep the unruly Sun Wukong in line.

'Now is the time for annihilating barbarians coming from all directions! Outsiders be vanquished!'

"I know, go forth, Ama no Murakumo!"

Godou swung his right arm, causing the silver-white circlet to fly towards the Great Sage Equaling Heaven.

Like the Ruyi Staff whose length could extend and retract at will, the dimensions of this ring could also be controlled freely. Like the Great Sage himself, this ring could also create clones of itself, and Godou split it into three giant rings in an instant.

The three rings struck the three-in-one Great Sage Equaling Heaven who was battling intensely with the two Benevolent Kings .

At the same time as the rings hit, the Benevolent Kings vanished . Mission accomplished, Luo Cuilian dispelled them.

'Ugh!' 'So this was the ominous premonition I felt earlier!?' ' Calm down, Big Bro, Middle Bro!'

The three rings respectively struck right on target the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, the wild boar and the dragon wrapped around the Great Sage's body, restraining their bodies like handcuffs.

Like Sun Wukong's Constricting Circlet, the silver-white rings imprisoned the three-in-one Great Sage Equaling Heaven and his sworn brothers — wait, that's not completely accurate!

One person managed to overcome the circlet and escape, it was of course the Great Sage Equaling Heaven.

Jumping nimbly with movements like lightning, he tried to escape to the skies, but at this time, a silver-white flash of light flew and struck the Great Sage in the forehead.

"Ouch!?"

It was John Pluto Smith's last magic bullet.

Godou was greatly surprised to find the Great Sage resilient enough to withstand the direct hit with only cries of 'ouch' but thanks to the impact, the divine monkey of steel also lost his balance.

Using this opening, Godou ordered Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi to send a silver-white ring towards the escaped prey, finally capturing the Great Sage Equaling Heaven this time.

Thus the three rings dragged the three divine spirits back to the bottom of the crater they had made during their re-entry.

However, merely restraining them did not amount to victory.

The black demonic bird leaped down into the meteorite crater where they were located and its mighty wings began to give off fire.

"For annihilation I count the number of my great works — I am the axe of the night that summons termination, lowering the final curtain for the world's destruction, the messenger from hell!"

These were the flames of annihilation, the transformation that executes all enemies by incinerating his own body.

The black flames melted the steel rings that imprisoned the Great Sage Equaling Heaven and his subordinate gods. In the end, the steel rings generated by Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi were melted down into liquid state.

Molten steel filled the crater, engulfing the Great Sage and his brothers.

It was like a natural furnace. Invincible steel was being melted down and losing its form. The Great Sage Equaling Heaven, the giant boar and dragon were all turning into shapeless masses within the furnace.

Athena once said — super high temperature that melts iron was the natural predator of the sword gods of steel.

Godou's first thought was a furnace, which is why the flames of annihilation and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi were used together to create this natural predator!

"Waaaaaah!"

With final pitiful cries of death, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven and his sworn brothers finally melted completely.

This was the moment of complete victory for the three Campiones — Kusanagi Godou, Smith and Luo Hao.

Epilogue

It was a little more than ten minutes after the end of the intense battle on the plains of Senjougahara.

Kusanagi Godou was brought back to normal life with a phone call from Sayanomiya Kaoru.

'Though I had worried if the situation might become very severe, Kusanagi-san, your victory was splendid this time.'

"Eh? From where did you watch our battle?"

Godou began to search with his eyes the plains of Senjougahara which had been turned into a dismal wasteland.

Before he could report the outcome of the battle, the chance to break the news was seized from him.

'When the decisive battle began, the barrier of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven was also destroyed so I was able to watch the entire process using investigative magic all the way over from Toushouguu. In the end, I was fortunate enough to witness the cooperation of you kings. I look forward to great things in your future, and the way you took command was simply magnificent.'

"Ah, not at all, it wasn't anything special... Anyway, how's the damage this time?"

Praised in an unwanted area, Godou felt cold sweat running down his back.

'Damage... Hmm, Toushouguu has suffered complete destruction. If it were to be restored, the time required would be on the order of years. As for how the crater on the plains of Senjougahara should be covered up, I am still discussing it with my subordinates.'

Kaoru's voice did not sound calm or composed at all. She really seemed to be worried.

Godou glanced at the great crater before his eyes, a little apologetic in his heart. At some point in time, the boiling molten steel had somehow disappeared.

The beautiful wetlands were marred by a huge crater with a diameter of 300m.

Even if one were to call it a crop circle, it would be far too big...

'All the various citizens and tourists who had turned into monkeys are now recovering consciousness. We have started providing them with psychological counseling.'

"Psychological counseling?"

'Yes, the vast majority of the saved victims lost the memories from the time when they were monkeys, but a portion of them reported seeing a monkey god and having a nightmare of transforming into a monkey, and in that dream a frightful devil king appeared and threatened them, that if they don't help him out they would be turned into monkeys once again.'

Godou had a great shock. Was this caused by the stress of the [Goat]!?

'Plus there were unbelievable phenomena like those who were sure they had been at Toushouguu, but woke up at Lake Chuuzenji, or people who should be sleeping at home, but found themselves outside. It's a bit difficult to cover everything up with a reason like mass hallucination, so we will start using hypnosis wizardry to edit their memories.'

It seemed like things had become very serious.

Godou felt extremely apologetic and started acting very awkwardly.

'The victims need the provision of psychological counseling as well as mass hypnosis and the implanting of fabricated memories. Though it is a difficult undertaking with thousands of subjects, we have already made full preparations during everyone's battles, and we will definitely give it our best.'

This was the description of the efforts for preventing the disclosure of news about gods. It sure sounded like fictional dialogue from television.

However, even if information could be manipulated, the physical evidence left behind in the real world could not be eliminated so simply...

Godou could do nothing but sigh as he hung up the phone, facing the massive evidence carved out of the great land.

"Looks like losses were unexpectedly small. Truly wonderful."

"It feels particularly delightful to finally close the case on the Great Sage Equaling Heaven. Godou and Smith, I, Luo Hao, must surely reward the both of you well for your contributions in our cooperative battle."

Beside the sighing devil king were the other two Campiones.

As a side note, even though the Great Sage Equaling Heaven had been defeated, no one seemed to have usurped any authority. Was it really because the battle ended with a three-versus-one finish?

"Then I shall take my leave. Until next time."

"You're going already? Isn't there still a lot of cleanup to handle ? You're not staying to help?"

As the masked king suddenly took his leave, Godou immediately asked him to stay without a thought.

Even though they had only fought together as comrades briefly, Godou felt that, if he had to put it into words, Smith was a man who resonated surprisingly well with him. To be frank, Godou felt a slight reluctance to part.

"Truly regrettable, but it won't fit John Pluto Smith's style otherwise. When the curtain falls upon the stage, the actor must exit. When the battle concludes, the hero and devil king must also vanish."

Smith answered with an obviously posed tone of voice.

Expecting this kind of answer from the start, Godou could not help but smile wryly as things occurred as predicted.

"As a return favor for the incident this time, I promise to help you out in America if you're in trouble."

"Pardon my frankness, but if someone disastrous like you came over, who knows what kind of tragedy would befall my homeland ? However, if you really did visit, I would have no choice but to take up the responsibility of supervising you."

Smith extended his black leather-gloved right hand.

Godou shook hands in return. Inconsistent with the image of the pretentious nobleman, the hand felt unnaturally soft.

"Your Beautiful Eminence, please take care, though who knows when we shall meet again. If possible, I, John Pluto Smith, never wish to make you my enemy."

The black caped king bowed elegantly and extended his hand towards the third king.

The demonic cult leader showed an expression that seemed to say 'Could he actually be offering to shake hands?' Godou frantically blurted out:

"Nee-san, I think it would be very childish if you ignored him."

"What—!? You are staring at me with those eyes again! I understand of course. Your elder sister simply has misgivings as a maiden against shaking hands with an unidentified man!"

Delivering a contrived excuse, Luo Cuilian extended her hand in kind.

Smiling like a prankster beneath his mask, Smith immediately transformed as soon as he let go, turning into the black demonic bird and taking flight.

(Afterwards, a certain American lady was taking a return plane trip, anxiously worrying to herself: 'That boy, really, seemed to be gazing at me with such thoughtful eyes a number of times... Unconsciously I began to feel happy and became more and more familiar with him. Perhaps, could there be some kind of fated bond between us... Annie, you idiot, he's ten years younger than you! And a super sex maniac as well, completely unsuitable! However, in the rare chance that...' Of course, Kusanagi Godou had no way of knowing that such a little interlude occurred.)

Only two of the three Campiones remained.

"You won, Godou!"

It was Erica, and all the rest of his female companions had arrived, apparently safe and sound.

Erica led the way with Yuri, Liliana and Ena following behind.

More surprisingly, even Amakasu Touma and Lu Yinghua arrived immediately after them.

"Cough cough, what a hard day's work, Kusanagi-san. Originally I wondered if I could help in some way, and rushed here from Toushouguu by car, but you seemed to have settled everything by yourself."

"Spared the necessity of resolving ourselves to a sacrificial battle against gods, we really need to cheer hurray."

It was the arrival of the girls and the much-missed male faction. However, the new arrivals all suddenly froze in their tracks, because Luo Cuilian had placed her hands on Godou's shoulders.

"So Godou, though it pains me to leave my 'little brother' behind, there are the sayings, friendship between gentlemen is as insipid as water,[95] while all banquets naturally come to an end. Your elder sister now returns to Mount Lu."

"Little..." "Brother?" "And..." "Elder!?" "Sis?" "-ter!?"

Erica, Liliana, Yuri, Ena, as well as Amakasu and Lu Yinghua were all speechless.

The demonic cult leader ignored them and continued, completely failing to register their existences in her eyes.

"Until we meet again, you must work hard and improve. First of all, you have to practice the proper way to address me, understood?"

"Uh, can't I just use 'Nee-san' directly?"

Even faced with a solemn order, Godou tried to muddle through without outright agreeing.

Since he had already learnt the basics of how to get along with this elder sister, and because the other party was someone who could not be understood with common sense, Godou knew he cannot be caught up in her rhythm and must express an appropriate degree of self determination.

"You have no wish to express reverence to the supreme exalted elder sister?"

"It's important to not be fettered by trivial matters of address. Rather, what's key is the way I see you. Nee-san and I made a vow to become sworn siblings. With such an important promise between us as companions, this fact will forever remain unchanged until the day I die. Isn't that good enough?"

When facing Luo Cuilian, Godou found himself somehow able to resist unlike the way the other girls always caught him in their whims.

Perhaps thanks to the emphasis of the 'sibling' relationship, as long as he avoided seeing Nee-san as a 'woman', he felt like he could say anything without reservation.

"What a handful to handle you are... I've heard that younger brothers are cuter if they are a little bit naughty so I shall grant you special permission this once. However, please do not forget, you are the only person in this world who is allowed to call me your elder sister, understood?"

"No problem. You take care too, may we meet again as willed by fate."

Having bid their farewells, Luo Cuilian left Godou's side.

Flower petals began to flutter all around her. Was this the tree peony?[96] As the elder sister and also transcendent beauty was surrounded by the glamorous blizzard of petals, she vanished with a whoosh.

"Uh... what is this about? Unbelievable that Master would..."

With an extremely impressed expression, this time it was Lu Yinghua who approached.

"I never would have expected Kusanagi-sama to have entered a sibling pact with Master. The humble disciple Lu Yinghua, hereby congratulates my Esteemed Uncle!"

"Esteemed Uncle!? Don't call me such a weird name!"

Godou reprimanded the youth who was saluting in the martial arts way with one fist held against an open palm, his head bowed respectfully.

"Well, since you are Master's sworn younger brother, and also my superior in martial might, I cannot casually address you... So, what about calling you Godfather?"

"That's even worse, I'm not some kind of mafia boss!"

"Actually, since Master rules the Martial Realm and all Chinese-trained martial artists, it is rather like being a mafia boss... After further consideration, I think it's best that I call you Honored Uncle. So, Honored Uncle, Lu Yinghua takes his leave."

Leaving with a smile devoid of his usual snobbishness, Lu Yinghua departed.

As befitting of the qinggong master, he was gone like the wind in an instant.

— Getting acquainted with so many powerful people, and becoming unexpectedly familiar with them, let's hope this incident is resolved with that... It was just as Godou was about to breathe a sigh of relief.

"I say, Godou, when did you get so intimate with Her Eminence ? It's so intimate that it's a little suspicious."

Erica's beautiful voice questioned.

Why? Somehow it felt like there were hidden barbs in that glamorous voice.

"It's not so strange, right? In truth, she's actually quite a friendly person... Uh, though I do think that she tends to be a bit disruptive , so it would be a bad idea to let her loose in places with many people."

"For you to find a way to get so intimate with that kind of woman, how exactly did you hook up with Her Eminence?"

"She seemed to be calling you 'little brother', right? I feel the same as what Erica-san is insinuating, with just one or two days' time, it is very suspicious for relations to have progressed to such intimacy. Really, Godou-san you..."

Even Yuri lowered her gaze as if heart-broken.

She still had her bad habit of stopping midway in her sentences even when there was much more she wanted to say.

"Another person agrees, further confirming my speculation. I only took my eyes off you for a moment, and there you go settling such decisive matters on your own. You truly are a monster."

"So amazing! Because it is too cool, even Ena doesn't know what to say."

Liliana nodded firmly, and even Ena was wryly poking fun at herself.

What was going on with them? Godou felt himself shrinking in retreat. Come on, all he did was gain something like a step-sibling, why were they all reacting so subtly!?

"Come on, could you all quiet down a bit? Yuri-neechan and all the other Onee-sama should know your bounds. Onii-sama just finished this severe and deadly battle. Really, you have all failed to be mindful of that!"

Help came from an unexpected ally in the form of Mariya Hikari who had not been seen earlier. Held in her arms against her chest were cans of coffee and bottled tea and water.

"I think everyone is acting a bit lacking in feminine delicacy... Right, Onii-sama, these are drinks I bought at the vending machine from a nearby restaurant. Which kind would you like?"

"It's for me? Thanks."

Having loudly chastised the older girls, Hikari immediately put away her intimidating anger and smiled at Godou.

She must have been absent earlier because she took a long route ? Figuring that out, Godou was very pleased with Hikari's thoughtfulness. After going through such an intense battle, his throat did feel very parched.

Hikari proceeded to narrow her eyes and gaze at him with a tender expression.

This expression and gesture did not match her young age, and should only be displayed by mature women.

"Actually, I wanted to cook something for you, but it can't be helped in a place like this... By the way, I'm pretty good at making dishes. Not as well as Onee-chan, but for a student of my age, my skills are not bad at all. Next time, please enjoy a lunchbox prepared by me."

"I don't really mind, but we go to different schools."

"In that case, we can just go out together. Why not next Saturday?"

"An acquaintance will probably be asking me to put in a shift for work... Eh? What is with everyone?"

Starting at some point, the surrounding mood had changed.

Erica deliberately shrugged with exaggeration. Yuri timidly gazed at Godou and her sister.

Ena sighed uncharacteristically, saying something like 'Hikari ended up becoming His Majesty's woman as well, this is far too shocking.'

"Kusanagi Godou, looks like I have won the wager this time. Let alone a month, the result arrived in less than a fortnight. This actually exceeds my expectations..."

Then Liliana proceeded to say something incomprehensible.

"No matter how things went, the fact of my winning remains unchanged. I, Liliana Kranjcar, will henceforth become your loyal vassal like no other, serving by your side and offering everything to you as your premier knight."

Hearing her sudden unexpected victory declaration, Godou was speechless and completely bewildered by what she was trying to say.

Greatly perplexed, Godou turned to look at the only other male remaining at the scene, Amakasu. What on earth was going on?

"Kusanagi-san... Because you dug your own grave, I cannot help you."

The observing ninja descendant teased Godou with a strained expression, trying his hardest not to burst out in laughter.

"Hikari... What on earth are you trying to do!? I-If father and mother found out, do you know how they will scold you? Please think a little!"

"It's okay, Onee-chan."

In contrast to the older sister whose face was flushed red, the younger sister was very relaxed and complacent.

"If I explained that we will be serving Onii-sama as sisters, I'm sure grandpa and grandma will be very happy. In that case, father, who married into the Mariya family, probably won't say anything while mother is just an optimist. I don't think she'll mind."

Hoho. Hikari seemed to be laughing as if gloating over her victory.

"My dear group of Onee-sama, this is the fact of the matter. Please instruct and remind me well from now on... However, please don't worry, as the youngest member, I will humbly get along with you all, especially Erica-neesama. Everyone, I will be in your care."

"Looks like in terms of social aptitude, Hikari surpasses the older sister by far..."

Erica murmured with great feeling as she reached out to Godou beside her.

Then she pinched his upper arm hard.

"Ouch! What are you doing!?"

"In exchange for absolution from me, this little punishment is nothing, so stop complaining... Or perhaps in consideration for the future, it'd be best if I stab you once instead?"

Completely ignoring Godou's protest, Erica pondered seriously.

For some reason, Yuri, Ena, Liliana and Amakasu proceeded to nod vigorously in agreement.

There was a beautiful little girl standing on the peak of Nantaisan, overlooking the distant world beneath where lights dotted the streets.

If one were to look towards her hand, a heavy circular medallion would come into view.

A circular disc made of an alloy of gold and iron, it was about the same size as the girl's fist. Engraved with script that was

reminiscent of a [Sword], the girl gazed unerringly at its surface for quite a while, as the number of patterns incremented and a second [Sword] appeared on the circular sculpture.

"After Perseus, it was the Great Sage Equaling Heaven's turn to be destroyed, and both their steel have been left upon the earth. Clearly, that Great Sage will not be the last hero to manifest in this world..."

The blonde girl who resembled a classic western doll looked to be about twelve or thirteen in age. It was the Divine Ancestor who introduced herself as Guinevere to Luo Hao previously.

"When the Great Sage called upon the power to defeat devil kings and bring salvation to the world, I actually thought it might be possible, the destiny written in the stars for the 'one who manifests at the end' to become the strongest sword of [Steel]... Though incomplete, the Great Sage managed to make skillful use of it, as befitted the magnificent hero from the great land of China."

Breathing a sigh, she put the circular medallion away and it was at this time that Guinevere noticed a presence.

"Prince, though you may possess the power of god speed, you are really unskilled in the techniques of hiding in the shadows..."

"Hmph, you witch. Your sense of smell is sharp as ever."

From the shadows of the volcanic rocks, out stepped a man. It was Black Prince Alec.

His real name was Alexandre Gascoigne. As suggested by his family name, he was the Campione whose ancestry traced its roots back to France.

"I just wanted to find out what your true intentions are."

"How scary... But regrettably, the open matter has already been settled. Guinevere will be heading back home now. So, let us meet again in Europe."

"Very well, we shall meet again, Witch of Brittany."

If the Black Prince were to pursue using godlike speed, even the Divine Ancestor would be no match.

Knowing that the cold reply of the Black Prince implied that he had no intention of giving chase, Guinevere flew into the sky, enveloped in golden light.

"What a waste of a trip... That said, the strength of this monkey called the Great Sage Equaling Heaven really was too abnormal. What was the source of all that power?"

Watching the witch depart, Alec muttered to himself.

After finding out there were three other Campiones present, he had deemed it unnecessary to intervene. But for the sake of discerning the nature of that power, participating in the battle would not have been such a bad idea—

Ending his contemplation here, Alec shrugged his shoulders.

It was pointless to dwell any further on a concluded incident. If another similarly alarming situation were to arise in the future, just start gathering information all over again...

Afterword

Greetings everyone, it's been a while. I am Takedzuki Jou.

The second half of the Volume 6 story, Volume 7 has finally published without incident.

In this series, every time there are always ideas that I must abandon with great reluctance.

Simply stated, sometimes it's because of constraints in the number of pages in order to make the story a better read. Within these lost ideas, there are quite a lot of interesting thoughts.

Take Volume 4 the Perseus story for example. His origins were related to the Babylonian deity Marduk and the worship of Mithras which flourished at one point in the Roman Empire. This religion has many connections with Christianity and it took great determination for me to cut out all that content.

This time in the story of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, there were legends like the battle between a centipede god and a snake god on the plains of Senjougahara, but a good many of these ideas could not be fitted into the work.

Particularly regrettable is a little story that didn't make the cut, about the second strongest character besides the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, building a nightclub in the human world because of his frustrations.

I had written about a chapter's worth when I was told 'This is not needed.' In the end, it could not be used.

Readers who feel it's a shame that this character did not have a chance to shine, if you want to see the Campione story of the Hotel Master, please make your thoughts known to the Super Dash Bunko editorial department. With that, perhaps 'The Returned Zhu Bajie Strikes Back!' might be published one day.

So, these Volumes 6 and 7 were written as the theme for the ' Toei Manga Festival Cross Over.'

In the romantic comedy aspect, it became 'Kusanagi Godou's Round.' Always kept spinning around by the various girls, he was finally able to take control. Perhaps he can be like Gian[97] in his feature film incarnations, awakening heroism and bonds of friendship. Though this kind of situation is particularly rare, I would be most grateful if readers continue to anticipate this kind of scene.

The next volume is slated to consist of slice-of-life short stories.

Takedzuki Jou, June 2010

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ **Wandering Monk Sun**(孫): One of Sun Wukong's titles, Xingzhe() means "wandering monk," a reference to his joining the Buddhist faith in becoming the disciple of the monk Xuanzang in the *Journey to the West*.
2. ↑ **Nikkou Toushou-guu**: a Shinto shrine dedicated to Tokugawa Ieyasu, located in the city of Nikkou in Tochigi Prefecture. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.[1]
3. ↑ **Tokugawa Ieyasu**: the founder and first shogun of the Tokugawa Shogunate, which ended the Sengoku (Warring States) era.[2]
4. ↑ **Hakama**: traditional Japanese divided trousers.[3]
5. ↑ **Ruyi Jingu Bang**(如): the name of the magical weapon wielded by Sun Wukong, the protagonist of the classic Chinese novel Journey to the West.[4]
6. ↑ **Kao**(靠): a type of military outfit often worn by actors playing generals in Beijing opera.[5]
7. ↑ **Kun**(坤): one of the eight trigrams from the *Book of Changes* . The trigram for *kun* is .[6]
8. ↑ **Mudra**: religious hand gestures used in Buddhism.[7]
9. ↑ **Immortal**(仙): in Chinese Daoist tradition, a sage who achieved immortality through enlightenment.[8]
10. ↑ **Qi**(気): known variously as ki/chi/qi/chakra, an oriental concept of life energy. In *Campione!*, the concept is equivalent to magical power, and is the term used by Chinese characters , hence the romanization of "qi" will be used.

11. ↑ **Yueqin**: nicknamed the "moon guitar," a stringed traditional Chinese instrument that resembles a lute with a round body.[9]
12. ↑ **Ba Gua Zhi Jing Ji Ji**(八): the words of some kind of Daoist charm, "Ba Gua" refers to the eight trigrams of the *Book of Changes*.
13. ↑ **Li**(里): a traditional Chinese unit of distance. 108000 li would be equivalent to 54000 km or 33554 mi.[10]
14. ↑ **Torii**: traditional Japanese gate used as the entrance to Shinto shrines and also found within them. They symbolize a transition between realms.[11]
15. ↑ **Three Heroes and the Five Gallants**(三): a Chinese historical novel set during the Song dynasty, with Justice Bao as the main character.[12]
16. ↑ **Outlaws of the Marsh**(水): one of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literature, it tells the story of a group of 108 outlaws during the Song dynasty.[13]
17. ↑ **Tanzhishentong**(彈): a fictional martial arts technique that trained the fingers to great strength and precision, allowing a single flick to fire off innocuously light objects as deadly projectiles, break or disarm the weapons of opponents, or even attack at range with just the wind from the finger's motion. Widely known due to the immensely popular martial arts novels of Jin Yong.[14]
18. ↑ **Great Compassion Mantra**(大): a popular Buddhist mantra in East Asia for protection or purification.[15]
19. ↑ **Onmyoudou**(陰): literally "the way of the Yin and the Yang", mixing science and occult, a traditional Japanese philosophy based on Chinese concepts of the Five Elements and the Yin-Yang duality.[16]

20. ↑ **Shugendou**(修): a Japanese mystical-spiritual tradition that melds ideas from various Buddhist sects, and seeks to attain enlightenment by becoming one with kami.[17]
21. ↑ **Dharani**: Buddhist mantras involving meaningful intelligible phrases.[18]
22. ↑ **Imperial Capital**: another name for Tokyo.
23. ↑ **Kantou region**(関): the region covering the Greater Tokyo Area and consists of the seven prefectures of Gunma, Tochigi , Ibaraki, Saitama, Tokyo, Chiba, and Kanagawa.[19]
24. ↑ **Utsunomiya**(宇): the capital of Tochigi Prefecture.[20]
25. ↑ **Mount Emei**(峨): one of the Four Sacred Buddhist Mountains of China.[21]
26. ↑ **Great Monk Shoudou**(勝): the Buddhist monk who founded the temple of Rinnou-ji.[22]
27. ↑ **Wakoku**(倭): the ancient term for the islands of Japan before it was recognized as a country.
28. ↑ *Book of Han*, Treatise on Rites and Music.[23]
29. ↑ **Sanzang**(三): pronounced Sanzou in Japanese, the central character who Sun Wukong has to escort in the *Journey to the West* to retrieve Buddhist scripture.[24]
30. ↑ **Noh**: a form of Japanese classical musical drama.[25]
31. ↑ **Kanami**: Kan'ami Kiyotsugu (観) was a Japanese Noh actor, author, and musician in the 14th century.[26]
32. ↑ **Zeami**: Zeami Motokiyo (世) was a Japanese actor and playwright, the son of Kanami.[27]
33. ↑ **Prajñā**: one of the three divisions of the Noble Eightfold Path in Buddhism, meaning wisdom.[28]

34. ↑ **Vaisravana**: one of the four cardinal protector gods of Buddhism. Equated with Sha Wujing (Sha Gojou in Japanese) from the Chinese classic novel *Journey to the West*.[29]
35. ↑ **Three Treasures**: the three things that Buddhists seek guidance from — Buddha (can be interpreted as the historical figure, or to seek the highest spiritual potential in all things); Dharma, the teachings of Buddha; and Sangha, the community of those who have reached enlightenment.[30]
36. ↑ **Yama-biko**: an echoing spirit in Japanese folklore, often heard but rarely seen.[31]
37. ↑ **Zhu Ganglie**(豬): one of the names of Zhu Bajie (Cho Hakkai in Japanese), the infamous pig spirit who was apprenticed to the monk Xuanzang and became Sun Wukong's junior in the Chinese classic novel *Journey to the West*. Taken literally, the name Zhu Ganglie means strong-maned pig.[32]
38. ↑ **Zhu Wuneng**(豬): one of the names of Zhu Bajie (Cho Hakkai in Japanese), the infamous pig spirit who was apprenticed to the monk Xuanzang and became Sun Wukong's junior in the Chinese classic novel *Journey to the West*. Zhu Wuneng was the name given by his master, Xuanzang the monk.[33]
39. ↑ **Sha Wujing**(沙): the third disciple of the monk Xuanzang and Sun Wukong's junior in the Chinese classic novel *Journey to the West*. Sha Wujing was the name given by his master, Xuanzang the monk.[34]
40. ↑ **Wu**(悟): note how Sun Wukong(), Zhu Wuneng() and Sha Wujing() shares the same character "Wu" in their names.
41. ↑ *Book of Changes*.[35]

42. ↑ *Mantra of Acala*.[36]
43. ↑ *Mantra of Vaisravana*.[37]
44. ↑ **Kulikaa**: (Kurikara in Japanese), the Sanskrit name of Acala's sword of wisdom that cuts through deluded and ignorant minds.
45. ↑ **Three Poisons**: the three root causes of suffering in life, according to Buddhism.[38]
46. ↑ **Acala**: known as Fudou Myouou(不) in Japanese, an angry wrathful guardian deity in Vajrayana Buddhism.[39]
47. ↑ **Kuukai**(空): "The Grand Master who Propagated Buddhist Teaching"() was a Japanese monk who founded the Shingon school of Japanese Buddhism.[40]
48. ↑ **True Lord Erlang**(二): a Chinese god with a truth-seeking third eye in the middle of his forehead. The greatest warrior god in the Chinese/Daoist pantheon, he is best known in *Journey to the West* as the one who pressured Sun Wukong and captured him for the heavenly forces.[41]
49. ↑ **Witenagemot**: ("meeting of wise men" in Old English) a political institution in Anglo-Saxon England. In the *Campione !* setting, this organization deals with matters related to Campiones.[42]
50. ↑ **SSI**: Sorcerous Sacrilege Investigation, an American organization that opposes the activities of sorcerers. In the *Campione!* setting, sorcery refers specifically to an evil variant of magic.
51. ↑ **Tachi**(太): a type of traditional Japanese sword worn by the samurai class of feudal Japan.[43]
52. ↑ **MEXT**: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

53. ↑ **MLIT**: Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism
54. ↑ **Qinggong**(軽): literally "technique of lightness", a Chinese martial arts skill that allows great agility and speed of movement. When exaggerated in fiction, it produces the effect of superhuman speed and even flight. Equivalent to [Leap] magic of western magi.[44]
55. ↑ **Red Torii**(赤): picture can be viewed here.[45]
56. ↑ **Heart Sutra**: Godou is reciting the *Heart Sutra*, one of the best known and most popular Buddhist prayers.[46]
57. ↑ **Yueqin**(月): nicknamed the "moon guitar," a stringed traditional Chinese instrument that resembles a lute with a round body.[47]
58. ↑ **Cymbidium kanran**(寒): to be precise, the exact description is the Cymbidium kanran, a species of orchid.[48]
59. ↑ **Tiger lily**: the flower *Lilium lancifolium*, renowned as the most beautiful lily in Asia.[49]
60. ↑ **Oath of the Peach Garden**: in the Chinese historical novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, Liu Bei, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei became famous sworn brothers through an oath of fraternity.[50]
61. ↑ **Trout meunière**: a French cooking method mainly used for fish, involving breading the fish using flour, frying it with butter and adding a particular sauce.[51]
62. ↑ **Yakshini**: a broad class of female nature spirits from Hindu mythology, usually depicted as beautiful but vengeful .[52]
63. ↑ **Don Juan**: a legendary fictional character, synonymous to " womanizer."[53]
64. ↑ Cryptic quotes from the *Book of Changes*.[54]

65. ↑ **Avalokitasvara**: called Guanyin(觀) in Chinese and commonly known in English as the Goddess of Mercy, a bodhisattva venerated by East Asian Buddhists and associated with compassion.[55]
66. ↑ **Six Senses**: in Buddhism, the mind is regarded as an additional sense.[56]
67. ↑ **Kao**: a type of military outfit usually worn by actors playing generals in Beijing opera.
68. ↑ **Bagua**(八): the eight trigrams from the *Book of Changes*. A reference to the story in the *Journey to the West* where Sun Wukong was locked into a cauldron for 49 days to be distilled into an elixir.[57]
69. ↑ Psalm 22:22
70. ↑ **David**: both Erica's Golgotha spell words and Liliana's Song of the Bow originate from King David's *Psalms* from the Old Testament of the Bible.[58]
71. ↑ **Energy center**(丹): a pressure point located below the navel (about three finger widths down and two finger widths deep), it is associated with cultivating life energy (qi) and vital essence.[59]
72. ↑ **Ming**: the dynasty ruling imperial China from 1368–1644. *Journey to the West* was written in the 16th century (1500s).
73. ↑ *Book of Changes*, Wu Wang(無) hexagram.[60]
74. ↑ **Qimen-Dunjia**(奇): A type of traditional Chinese metaphysical art, used for divination and various decision-making processes. Fictionally, it is also used as a category of supernatural spells and escape techniques.[61]

75. ↑ **Yin**: yin as in yin-yang, the duality of complementary opposites. Yin represents darkness, gentleness, the moon, femininity, etc in opposition to yang which represents light, strength, the sun, masculinity, etc.
76. ↑ **Juunihitoe**(十): literally "twelve-layer robe", the juunihitoe is an extremely elegant and highly complex kimono that was worn only by court-ladies in Japan.[62]
77. ↑ Genesis 27:26-28
78. ↑ **Kamaitachi**(鎌): literally the "sickle weasel," a Japanese weasel youkai believed to wield sharp claws while riding on gusts of wind.[63]
79. ↑ Numbers 31:7-8
80. ↑ Numbers 31:9-10
81. ↑ Numbers 31:11-12
82. ↑ Joshua 6:13
83. ↑ Joshua 6:15-16,21
84. ↑ Joshua 6:25
85. ↑ **Catty**(斤): a traditional Chinese unit of weight, roughly equal to 600g. 13500 catties would be equivalent to 8100kg.[64]
86. ↑ A quote from the Daoist philosophical classic *Zhuangzi*.[65]
87. ↑ **Style name**: a Chinese style name, also known as a courtesy name, was a given name generally used after the age of twenty as a sign of adulthood and respect. The use of style names have fallen out of tradition since the early twentieth century.[66]
88. ↑ **Ziwei**(紫): a group of stars lying near the north celestial pole.[67]
89. ↑ **Benevolent Kings**(仁): usually depicted in pairs, muscular and wrathful guardian deities of Buddha and manifestations

of Vajrapani. They stand on guard at the entrance of Buddhist temples in the form of frightening statues.[68]

90. ↑ **Shramana**: a parallel movement to Vedic Hinduism in ancient India which gave rise to Buddhism, Jainism and Yoga .[69]
91. ↑ **Qiang**(槍): Due to its relative ease of manufacture, the spear in many variations was ubiquitous on the pre-modern Chinese battlefield. Common features of the Chinese spear are the leaf shaped blade and red horse-hair tassel lashed just below. The tassel serves a tactical purpose, and is not simply for decoration.[70]
92. ↑ *Heart Sutra*[71]
93. ↑ A quote from the Daoist philosophical classic *Zhuangzi*.[72]
94. ↑ **Open-mouthed**(阿): each pair of (Om/A-un) Buddhist statues consists of one each of two types — one open-mouthed and the other with a closed mouth.[73]
95. ↑ **Friendship between gentlemen...**(君): a saying that originates from the Daoist philosophical classic, *Zhuangzi*(莊子). The full saying is "Friendship between gentlemen, they say, is insipid as water; that of petty men, sweet as rich wine. But the insipidity of the gentleman leads to affection, while the sweetness of the petty man leads to revulsion. Those with no particular reason for joining together will for no particular reason part."[74]
96. ↑ **Tree peony**(牡): *Paeonia suffruticosa* is a type of peony native to China and historically renowned as the King of Flowers.[75]
97. ↑ **Gian**: Doraemon reference.[76]